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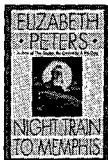
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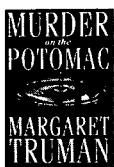
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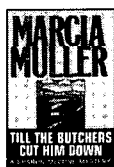
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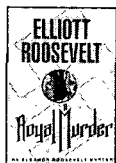
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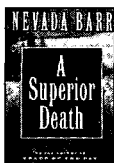
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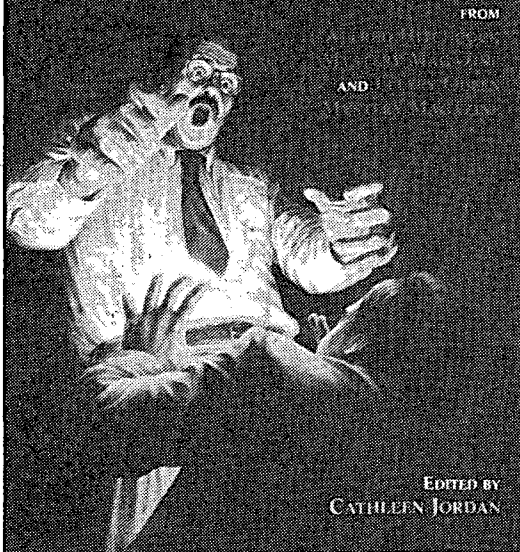
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# EDITOR'S NOTES

by Cathleen Jordan

**T**wo authors in this issue are Australians (but both were born in New Zealand): Neil Jillett, whose story "The Bad Patch" is set in Sydney in the early fifties, and Justin D'Ath, author of "The Pot at the End of the Rainbow."

Mr. Jillett's first story for us, "Miss Bradford and the Little Monsters," was published in our January 1991 issue and was followed by "Prickly Pairs," "Aurora Australis," and "Off the Wall." A film and dance critic for *The Age*, a Melbourne daily newspaper, he has traveled widely for the paper and was for several years its South-East Asia correspondent. "Assignments," he says, "have ranged from bullfights in Mexico to the fall of Sihanouk in Cambodia and the rise of Marcos in the Philippines to cat shows in Sydney." In 1989, Col-

lins Australia published his first novel, a black comedy thriller titled *Copycat*, his first fiction since the 1950's when he wrote a handful of short stories for Australian magazines.

Coincidentally, Mr. D'Ath's first novel, *The Initiate*, was also published by Collins in 1989. Author of more than two dozen other short stories, Mr. D'Ath first appeared in AHMM in the December 1989 issue with "No Photographs," and again, in August 1990, with "Whatever Happened to Crocodile Jarvis?" He has written over two hundred articles on all sorts of subjects, from jogging to photography, and tells us that he went to Australia in 1971 "to study missionary priesthood. After three years absconded on a motorbike, rode round Australia for three

(continued on page 22)

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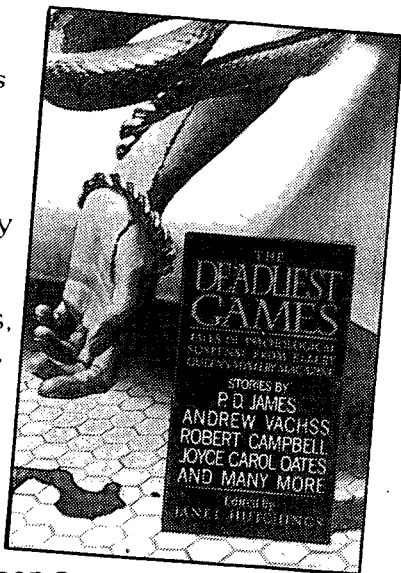
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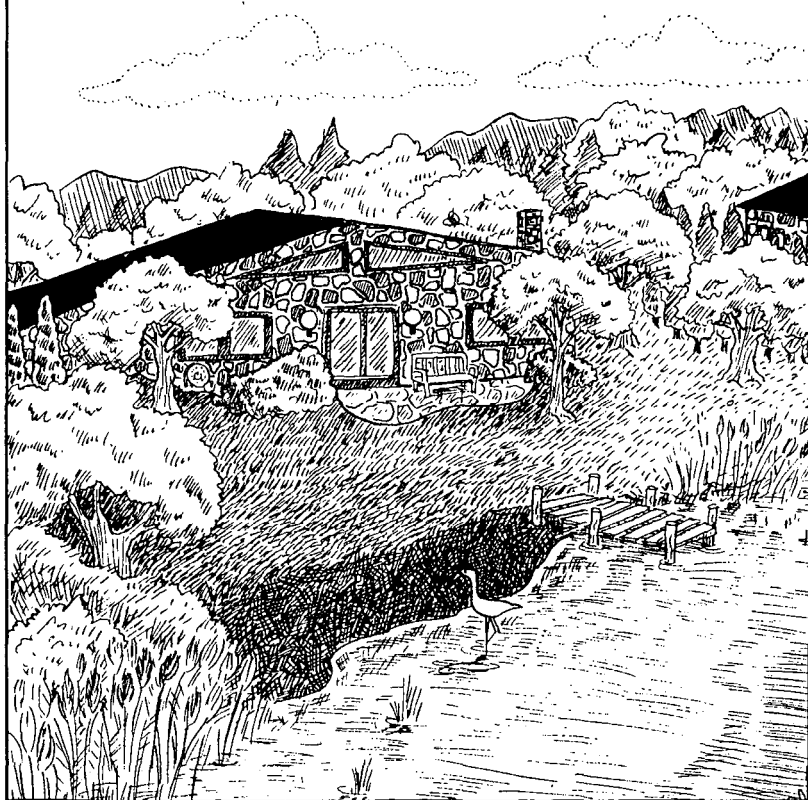
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FICTION

# One of These Days . . .

by Stephen Wasylyk



*Illustration by Pat Olstad*

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The summer had not only produced a bumper crop of tomatoes in back yards throughout the valley, but also an unprecedented stand of FOR SALE signs in the front ones. When a major plant in the area closes, real estate sales vanish like campaign promises after an election.

A stocky, middle-aged apparition, encased in a cool, crisp white blouse and tailored slacks, appeared out of the July heat. Gleaming honey colored neck-length hair, warm brown eyes, and a smooth-skinned face took ten years off her age.

The day Marvelous Mary walked in and announced she had decided to allow me to employ her had been one of my rare lucky ones.

She settled at her desk, fanning herself with a file folder.

"If I hear the words global warming once more, my karate trained toes go into action. Jody send his weekly fax?"

Jody Henner's house had been vacant since April. He and Marge had expected to stay there until grayhaired, but when the plant closed, the corporation offered him a transfer to Amarillo or a fat severance. Since the money would expire long before he did, he'd sadly handed me the key.

"He said an oracle consulted a horned frog and told him this was his week."

She grinned. "Texas hasn't destroyed his sense of humor."

Ten miles from town, the house was one of six built along the river before the developer went bankrupt. Long, low, all stone, it nestled in the trees and blended into the sloping riverbank. Beautiful and well designed—but a mile off the main highway, and because the project had never been completed, at the bottom of the list for every county service including opening the road after a snowstorm.

Perfect, though, for well-heeled, childless, independent types willing to sacrifice the usual amenities of communal living for privacy, river access, and a beautiful view.

Outside a BMW paused, reversed, and inserted itself expertly into a spot in front of the office. The designer-tagged long blouse and skirt didn't conceal the sensuality of the woman who stepped out. Dark hair, fastened back loosely with a ribbon, hadn't achieved that gleam and casualness over a bathroom sink. She slung a purse over a shoulder, looked at my sign, and came around the car with get-the-hell-out-of-my-way strides. The only person I knew who walked like that was Sheriff Woody Barr, who had acquired his ambulatory style in the Marines.



She threw open the door, bore down on me, and handed over our ad from the *New York Times* extolling the virtues of Jody's house.

"My name is Agatha Pulver. I'd like to see this place."

Pleasant voice. Smooth, oval face with a firm chin and hazel eyes that seemed to expect a challenge. Went with that walk. I'd have expected her to call before driving the hundred and some miles, particularly during a heat wave, but everything about her said she believed in direct action and little talk. A totally with-it female steamrolling her way through life.

Jody's oracle just might be correct.

"We'll be happy to show it to you," I said, in the blue-blazer-with-ascot-at-the-neck voice I reserved for BMW and Mercedes drivers. "I'll drive you out there."

Mary cleared her throat. "You do have that appointment."

Appointments had dried up long ago. She was telling me to leave this card-carrying member of the sisterhood to her.

I nodded wisely. "Of course." I turned back to Agatha. "Mrs. Costanza will be as helpful, if not more so."

She smiled. "I don't doubt it."

Mary gave me a wink as I held the door. By the time they reached the house, they'd be chatting like sorority sisters.

When she called a half hour later, I expected "get the papers together." What I got was a trembling voice and "Better get Caveman Barr out here. There's a body in the living room."

She'd unlocked the door, stepped inside, and tapped in the code on the pad to deactivate the alarm. The sunken living room was in full view of the small entrance foyer. So was the man's body. She'd controlled her shock enough to determine he was dead before calling on her cellular phone. She'd touched only the door-knob and key pad, giving Woody the most pristine crime scene in his career—a vacant house untouched since the killer had left.

Since Agatha hadn't entered at all, Mary had driven her back to her car. Not likely we'd see her again. A body in the living room is definitely not a selling point.

Naturally, I'd high-tailed it out there on Woody's heels. He was responsible for the body, but I was responsible for the house. Before he threw me out, I'd seen a man in his thirties, dark hair full and wavy, wear-

ing a lightweight gray suit with his shirt collar open and his tie pulled down, curled in the fetal position in front of the fireplace, his arms wrapped around his chest as if to ease the pain of the bullet that had killed him.

I sent Mary home to the bosom of her family—a husband and three teenaged daughters—the best place to be after a shock.

Waiting for Woody to call, I considered my lot in life. Forty years old, a widowed realtor in a northeastern Pennsylvania valley town. Nothing more in his private life than a little fishing and chasing an attractive woman now and then. Without much success, due primarily to a lack of enthusiasm. One of life's countless failures who had conceded early that fame and fortune were beyond him and said to hell with it.

Only one source of pride. As a bystander, I'd helped Woody solve a few murders that had him stumped. But I wasn't standing by in this one. I had a personal interest.

He called about six. "Barnstable's in an hour," he said.

**B**arnstable's had been built in the days of the Model T Ford, a log cabin that had

sprouted additions during the decades, its appearance so decrepit it was overlooked by most of the tourists. A small alcove had always been reserved for the sheriff, a tradition begun during Prohibition so the electorate couldn't gaze upon their chief law enforcer imbibing an illegal beverage.

I also suspected no Barnstable wanted a sheriff in full view in the dining room, particularly a brush-haired, slab-sided, wide-shouldered, square-jawed one like Woody, who was enough to make even the most innocent diner nervous.

I had his double shot of Wild Turkey waiting when he joined me, his one and only drink each day. A matter of discipline, he said. If one couldn't bring him back to normal, he'd kill the bottle and turn in his badge.

"His name was John Smith." He swirled the drink. "One of the real ones. This one was John A. for Alexander. He worked at the same plant as Henner, lived down the street a bit. Didn't get an offer to go to Amarillo, so he's been looking for a job for three months. His wife Corinne works at First National as a loan officer. You probably know her. Blonde schizophrenic hairdo—"

"Schizophrenic hairdo?"

"Can't make up its mind if it's hair or mattress stuffing.

Yesterday morning he and some others drove to Harrisburg to see if our duly elected representatives could lean on the corporation to keep the health plan coverage a few more months. Expected to be home about nine. When he didn't show or call, she phoned us—"

"Not the people he went with?"

"He never gave her names. The night crew couldn't do more than check the state police and hospitals for accidents. So I had a good idea of who he might be before I got there. When I told her, she said she knew something was wrong when she didn't hear from him. He was the reliable type. God, home, and country, and church every Sunday. No coke, pot, alcohol, or topless bar addiction."

He downed half his drink. "She had no idea why he'd go into that house. Bloodstain shows he was shot right where he fell. Hot in there, so the M.E. is vague about the exact time a .38 was pushed against his chest. Robbery wasn't the motive. Wallet, gold watch, two hundred in a money clip." He finished the drink. "Wonder Woman said neither of you had been out to the house for weeks. If she hadn't found him, Lord knows when anyone would have."

"What I don't understand is how someone got in. When Mary called, I thought he was one of those squatters we've had taking over vacant homes. I was in the car before I realized that was why I'd had Jody keep the alarm system active. Mary deactivated it when she entered. So even if entry was forced or a lock picked, the code was necessary to avoid alerting the security company."

"No forced entry or lock picked."

"So someone else had a key."

"Still has it. Wasn't on Smith. That's as far as we've gotten. While we're waiting for dinner, call Henner. Find out who, other than you, might have had access."

I waved ten dollars at Barnstable and used his office phone. Jody wasted quite a few of them spouting a variety of four letter words at long distance rates.

"He was one of your neighbors," I told him. "Two doors away. John Smith. Know him?"

Not very well, he said. Worked in a different department at the plant. Never even drove to work together. Shared a few barbecues each summer. How could Smith break into his house to get himself shot when he was paying a fat bill each month to the security company?

One of the things Woody was working on. The security company always asks for the name of a friend or relative—

The colonel. Next door. But he'd returned the key.

Marge Henner was no more help than her husband, although she'd been far friendlier with the neighbors. Women usually are. She was full of sympathy for Corinne Smith. Corinne and Stella Papokos, who lived next to the Smiths, used to invite her along on shopping trips, even mounting semiannual expeditions to New York. Best of friends, those two. Corinne would really need her now.

I told them I'd call again when I knew more.

The colonel, I told Woody, was retired from the army and lived between the Henners and the Smiths, some fifty yards away and screened off by a thick patch of trees and underbrush.

"Hard to find someone more trustworthy."

"Even colonels, retired or otherwise, know where to have a key duplicated."

"Marge and Jody may not remember giving the code to anyone else but could have mentioned it in casual conversation, and a friendly neighbor might have acquired a key at one time or another."

"Almost enough to drive me to a second drink," he said, "but let's eat, drink, and be merry and worry about it tomorrow."

**H**e phoned about mid-afternoon the next day.

"The colonel and his lady had dinner with another couple at Barnstable's last night. When I hinted he might have had a duplicate key made, he was ready to have me court-martialed." He chuckled. "But the man who drove Smith to Harrisburg saw the six o'clock news and came in last night. He says he let him off on the highway about eight because Smith said he wanted to walk the mile home to stretch his legs after riding all day."

"So he'd have been on the road in front of the house about twenty minutes later. Fits with the way he was dressed. If he'd made it home, he'd have changed clothes."

"Try this. It wouldn't have been quite dark yet, and he'd have known the house was vacant. Suppose he saw something and decided to investigate? And for his curiosity had a gun pushed into his ribs, was forced into the house and shot? So far, it's the only thing that fits. Seems to be exactly what he'd do, and the people we

talked to—not even the hint of a motive.”

“Might fit, but you still have no motive. Why did someone go to the trouble of getting a key and the security code to a vacant house? To live rent free for a few weeks or months? Hardly worth killing over if found out. Unless the house was being used as a meth lab or to store drugs—”

“Forensic found nothing. Hot air, a little dust, and a little mud tracked in.”

“Then what did Smith see that made someone want him dead?”

“Also try this. To get out there, you drive or walk, but no one saw a stranger or a strange car. Guess where I’m going to concentrate.”

“The rule book says always start close to home,” I said. “Corinne Smith has no alibi?”

Marvelous Mary breezed in, dropped behind her desk, and began flipping the pages of her notebook.

“Waiting anxiously but alone.”

“And other than the colonel and his wife?”

“Stella Papokos was also alone. Her husband came home about ten. The Zellers weren’t home at all, and Mrs. Halston took a shower about eight, washed her hair, and did whatever middle-aged women do to

repair the damage of the day. That gave *him* about an hour to come and go.”

Mary was giving me a let’s-get-back-to-business look.

“Do you mind if I go out there? Probably won’t accomplish anything, but the sooner this is settled, the sooner it’s forgotten. No one is anxious to buy the scene of a murder.”

“Help yourself. I know you go over a place with a magnifying glass to avoid running into any surprises from a buyer, so you might see something we’d miss.”

When I hung up, Mary said, “When you and the Caveman get going, the whole world stops. We’re in real estate, remember?”

I looked at the ceiling. “Women are delicate creatures who should never go bareheaded in the hot sun.” I gave her my best glare. “What?”

“Just wondering when I should call Agatha Pulver.”

“Don’t bother. She isn’t likely to be interested in a house where she might be murdered in her bed.”

“Oh, I think she’s smart enough to know what happened out there would have nothing to do with her. I’m not letting that big commission get away. With a teenage acne crisis on my hands, I’m going broke buying industrial size medication.



And what about our ethical problem? Here we have this huge living room, folks, and right there is where the body was found. Zip—they're gone. Of course, we could keep quiet, but they'll find out from the neighbors. How will that make us look? Incidentally, Jody's homeowner's is paid until December, so replacing the living room carpeting is covered."

I raised both hands in surrender as I walked out. Always out in front, Mary was. If she ever decided to open her own office, she'd put me out of business.

I drove past the Henners' house, the colonel's, the Smiths'—where two parked cars indicated that a couple of her friends were probably comforting the widow. Right now she'd be in shock, trying to absorb the reality of being a wife one moment and a widow the next—unless she killed him, which remained to be seen. The real grief would come later, but the friends would be gone and she'd have to cope with it on her own.

I knew exactly how that was. And would continue to be.

Marvelous Mary had a running feud with Woody because his attitude toward women was at least thirty years out of date. Wonder Woman *vs.* The Cave-

man. Women's Lib *vs.* Mr. Insensitive. But no matter how busy he'd been, he'd always found time to stop by or call every evening during those first few months, when all the important and unimportant things you had to do during the day kept you from thinking, and you came home to a silent house where memories were your only companion.

Stella would have to do the same for Corinne.

A car was in the Papokos driveway, but Stella was probably next door at the Smiths'. The young Zellers' house and the middle-aged Halstons' appeared deserted.

The road ended. I made a U-turn and slowly drove by Jody's house. Tired, hot, and sweaty, Smith had to have seen something strange enough to make him postpone a cool, refreshing shower only minutes away.

I parked under the trees in the driveway and stepped out into the heat.

No front lawn. The builder had merely thinned out the undergrowth and a few trees, and left enough room at the sides of the house to work comfortably.

I circled the house on the colonel's side. Even if he and his wife had been home, they could have seen nothing.

From the rear patio, a nicely trimmed lawn, studded with

stepping stones, sloped down to the river and a small floating dock. Everyone along the river owned a boat. Jody had sold his. If he ended up near water in Amarillo, he could buy another.

Some were buzzing about now, the hum of the outboards rising and falling and mingling with the faint shouts of a swimming party in front of one of the houses across the river.

On my right, a wall of thick forest ran down to the water. On my left, it screened off the colonel's place.

I walked down to the dock. The river swirled by, keeping its secrets. Since Jody left in April, it naturally had risen with the spring runoff and receded when the hot dry summer came along. Whatever sign he and his boat had left would have been erased long ago, so the heel print in the soft earth couldn't be his. I wondered if Woody had made a cast.

I blotted the perspiration from my face with a handkerchief draped over both hands, thinking that even the birds weren't chirping in this heat, turned to go, and noticed the small break in the trees along the riverbank on both sides of the clearing. Stupid of me to forget.

I doubted if there was a flowing body of water in the county

that didn't have a path, created by generations of fishermen moving along the banks looking for that elusive spot where the big ones lurked. Not really a path so much as an easier way through the trees. Hell, I'd walked this one long before these houses were built. It began at the main highway and ran past these houses and beyond, making the rear of this one accessible.

Who would know about it? The people who lived there. And almost every local who ever baited a hook.

I started back toward the house when two memory circuits in my brain closed. Both were something for Woody to look into. One could be the answer to the code and the key—if not that of the gun.

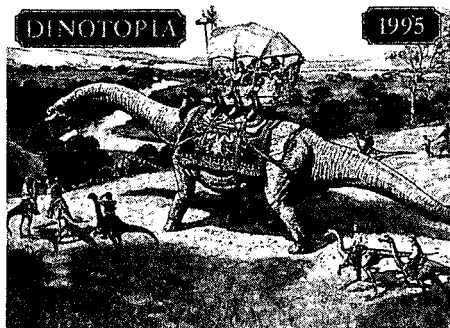
To have forgotten meant the heat had gotten to me or I was in the early stages of senility.

**I**n the morning, Mary was in the office before I was, cheerful and smiling. I'd given up cheerful and smiling years ago.

"You look grouchier than usual," she said brightly.

"You're fired," I said.

"Pay close attention, please. While you were out playing detective yesterday afternoon, I had a long talk with Agatha. She's a writer, and she's look-



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ing for a nice quiet place where she can curl up with her computer and fax and other electronic wonders. She's also a small town girl and wants to get out of New York, which makes her not only talented but exceptionally intelligent. Being snowbound doesn't faze her because she grew up on skis in Idaho or one of those places where it's summer only during the week of July Fourth. All she asks is a place that will appreciate in value, since she's into good investments; a few good restaurants because while she can cook she likes to eat out a lot; and an easy drive to New York, which it is."

"Is one of her investments in AT&T? Two gabby women can run up a phone bill faster than a gaggle of teenagers."

She ignored me as usual. "She's driving up late today."

"She's not nervous about the murder?"

"New Yorkers are used to bodies' being found all over the place. Besides, when you didn't come back, I figured you'd stumbled onto something and gone running to the Caveman, so it should be cleared up shortly. Right?"

She was still out ahead of me. "Right."

"Now, unspoken here is one little ploy that is going to put this sale in the bag. I could see

she's a lusty type, so I figure I have to throw in a little male companionship to sweeten the pot. I could let you show her the house, but you'd probably blow it because you know nothing about women, so I'll arrange a dinner at Barnstable's in appreciation for her long drive. I'll beg off because of my teenage acne crisis, so there you'll be with the opportunity of a lifetime."

I threw up my hands. "I don't believe this. *You're pimping your boss to sell a goddamn house?*"

"Don't be crude. I'm cultivating a client, and I've been telling you that you should settle down instead of chasing bimbos. Agatha could be it."

*"For all you know, Agatha is a bimbo with a word processor!"*

"Then you'll feel very comfortable with her. Now, what did you find yesterday?"

Right out of her salesman's manual. Never argue. Change the subject.

I sighed. "Look at the key to Jody's house."

She pulled it out of a drawer and examined it. "So?"

"What's written on the tag?"

"The code, of course."

"And when was the only time that key was out of our hands?"

She thought for a moment before her eyes widened. "Wesley Mather?"

"When our friendly fellow realtor showed up last month and said he had a prospect, we handed him the key with a smile. And forgot about him ten seconds after he returned it."

She folded her arms and grimaced. "Wesley Mather, self annointed as God's gift to women. That scumball has to be it. He even hit on me. I'd have stapled his curls to his scalp if I didn't know he slobbers like one of Pavlov's dogs whenever he sees a woman. One of these days, a couple of them will get together and exterminate him like a household pest. Well now. If Mather is involved, so is a female, right?"

I shrugged. "*Quién sabe, amiga*. Woody will either buy me a beer or tell me to stay with real estate."

She musingly tapped her lips with a forefinger. "Could be a plot here for Agatha."

"Right. And if the two of you sit bareheaded in the hot sun for a few hours, you might come up with a bestseller."

"Ha. How do you think writers get their ideas? And what's with the *quién sabe* stuff? You running around with a Hispanic behind my back?"

"Only the gardener we hired to keep the lawn mowed."

\*

Woody called after lunch. "Your gardener's no help. He's in and out in less than a half hour and never saw anyone. We already had a cast of that heel print and another from a trainer on the edge of the path to the colonel's house. Small. Very distinctive pattern. Has to be a youngster or a woman. The mud on the carpet came from the riverbank. About Wesley Mather. Daley, the guy who works for him, hasn't seen him for two days."

"And neither he nor Mather's wife reported it?"

"Wife? They were separated. She wouldn't care if he disappeared permanently. Because Mather's had money lately even though they've sold nothing, Daley figured he'd run into a wealthy, sex-starved tourist and she chained him to her bed to get full value. I think he conned you about a possible sale to get his hands on that key. Daley said it wasn't beneath him to use vacant houses for romantic purposes. From that river path, he could meet someone day in and day out at the Henners' without the neighbors' noticing a thing."

"Well, it couldn't have been very convenient for him, so it must have been convenient for the other party. It looks like you're down to two candidates."



"Which is why I'm going out there. I might pick up enough to get a warrant to look at trainer soles."

When I hung up, Mary tore a long strip of paper from her calculator and pulled it through her fingers to uncurl it, the hissing sound prickling the hair on my arms.

I rose, feeling a bit shaky. "Take care of business."

She smiled a smug smile. "What do you think I'm doing?"

No greater sales incentive than a teenage acne crisis. Agatha would be signing papers by sunset.

When I parked in Jody's driveway, Woody's cruiser was already in front of the Smiths'. I walked around the house and down to the riverbank. Across the way, the boats were still snarling up and down, and another swimming party was going strong.

I walked slowly to where the path began its mile-long course along the river on the way out to the highway.

I listened.

Oh, yes.

I took a deep breath and started out. Low, prickly shrubs caught at my slacks. Tall growing stalks had to be pushed aside and ducked un-

der, rewarding me with scratched hands.

I didn't have to go very far.

The hissing grew louder, then came the odor.

The mass of bluebottles rose in a swarm when I neared.

The body lay only a few feet off the path.

I retreated. Nothing anyone could do for Mather now.

I'd heard the sibilant sound of those hundreds of bluebottles the day before but, not knowing Mather was missing, had attributed it to the river or a touch of tinnitus.

I reversed course, past the Henners' and the colonel's moored runabout and up the slope to the front of the Smith house.

The chimes brought Stella Papokos and a waft of cool air to the door. A short and dainty woman, she was wearing a bright yellow button-down longsleeved shirt, white slacks, and white trainers, all of which went nicely with the bobbed dark hair and pixie face.

"Sheriff Barr here?"

Woody rose as I walked in.

Corinne was seated on the sofa, a size larger than Stella but dressed the same way. Her shirt was light blue to go with the wild blonde hair. Fellow shoppers without question.

We knew each other from my dealings with the bank, of

course. She nodded at me, pouched eyes rimmed with red.

After condolences, I beckoned Woody. "See you a minute?"

Outside, I said, "Your trainer idea is shot because they're wearing the same brand. I'll make it easy for you. You could ask both to roll up their sleeves and pants legs, but you'd get sued for voyeurism, intimidation, and sexual harassment. So take them both in and have a woman officer look them over."

"Are you *nuts*?"

"We're not talking about *my* insanity here. Mather's body is in the woods, about thirty feet in from the Henners'. The one who took him there and shot him had to get scratched. Like this." I held out my hands. "It was hot that night, and the odds are that she was wearing shorts and a sleeveless top. These things fade fast, but some must still show. That's why she's wearing slacks and long sleeves today."

He was on the way to his radio before I finished, not taking time to ask which one I thought it was. Let him find out for himself that Mather had sold the Papokoses their house and that that was how the famous lover met many of his conquests.

I reached my car in time to hear the phone binging away.

"Agatha's here," said Mary. "You want me to close the office or what?"

The police would be swarming around the place shortly.

"I want you to grovel at her feet. Tell her that police activity will keep you from showing the house until tomorrow. Then polish up your silver tongue and get her a room at the motel. On us. With all the perks of an Atlantic City high roller."

Her voice was sly. "Including a candlelit champagne dinner with the boss in the motel dining room?"

I sighed. "As long as it comes out of your commission."

Agatha certainly hadn't brought that dinner dress along to go househunting. Black and so short, skimpy, and tight that three male diners required the Heimlich maneuver, the female ones lost their appetites, and a hot-blooded Latino waiter dropped his tray.

But she'd also brought along the hazel eyes, a warm laugh, and an excellent sense of humor; always in short supply and far more necessary to a pleasant dinner.

Woody showed up at dessert time, a wave of silence following as he marched to our semi-circular booth. I suppose some

thought he was there to arrest her for indecent exposure.

I rose, introduced him, waved him to a seat, and, aware of his alternative word for champagne, signaled for a coffee cup.

"All over," he said briskly. "You first. I'll fill in the blanks." He turned to Agatha. "With your permission, of—"

Seeing her up close, he lost his voice. She gave him a smile that scorched his eyebrows, glazed his eyes, and made him quiver like a man hit on the head with a hammer.

"I'll be delighted to listen," she said.

He swallowed hard. He probably wouldn't hear a damned word, but I went ahead anyway.

"If Mather conned me out of the key and code to use the house as a meeting place with a woman, why would he need a gun? Then he disappears, and Daley said he was flashing money even though business was bad. I wondered if the house was being used not for romance but for something that would make the *other* party bring a gun. Like blackmail."

Agatha and Woody had started out three feet apart. Without apparent movement, they had magically closed the distance. Eyes fixed on him, Agatha had propped her chin

on her hand, smiling as if she'd just been awarded a Pulitzer.

Jody would be happy to learn his house had been sold.

Woody suddenly took a deep breath and shook his head sharply, as though Cupid had just bounced an arrow off his thick skull.

"You got that right, Sherlock. When it came to the trainers, the sole design was the same, but the wear pattern was different. That gave me Corinne. The scratches on her arms and legs were the finishing touch, but emotionally I don't think she could have held out much longer anyway. After John lost his job, she juggled a few things at the bank to supplement the family income, intending to pay it back when he found a job."

Agatha's eyes were nauseatingly adoring.

"One of Mather's accounts was involved. He didn't turn her in, preferring blackmail. She paid a few times until she decided there was no point to stealing, and giving *him* the money. She was going to pay him with a bullet. John came up the road in time to see her enter the house and leaped to the wrong conclusion. Wouldn't listen to her explanation. She's worrying about embezzlement, has Mather bleeding her, and now her husband, for whom she

stole the money in the first place, is accusing her of infidelity."

Agatha stiffened in righteous indignation.

"Too much stress for a woman with a gun in her hand. She said it went off accidentally—"

Agatha's eyebrows rose as if to say, what else?

"—giving her two reasons to march Mather into the woods and finish him after she forced him to set the alarm and lock up. I feel sorry for her."

I was sure he did. To Woody, women had been created to be nurtured and protected, not arrested.

Agatha patted his arm reassuringly. "A jury will understand we can't be angels *all* the time."

Heat waves shimmered above the booth as passion-fueled atoms collided wildly and approached meltdown. Ms. Modern Woman? The Cave-man? Mary 'would gnash her teeth. Betrayal of all woman-kind!

I left. They didn't even notice. Good. Woody could pay the check. Probably consider it worth every penny.

If Woody and the D.A. wanted to buy Corinne's confession, they were welcome. To me it was as full of holes as a mesh shirt.

I sat in my car and pondered.

If all Mather was interested in was the money, there were innumerable places where an envelope could be passed without anyone's noticing. He needed the house because he probably demanded a little fringe benefit. Much more comfortable indoors where one didn't have to contend with mosquitoes.

Very difficult for Corinne to sell the blackmail story to John under those circumstances. John would insist he knew what he was looking at; a typical husbandly stubbornness that would irritate any wife who was certain she had her husband's implicit trust. No wonder she'd shot him.

Which left Mather to contend with.

"Marched him into the woods," Woody had said.

It would have been dark—mountain valley darkness, so thick you could cut it with a knife. Pinpoints of light in the houses across the river and perhaps a bit of starshine, neither of which would help. She'd need a light—perhaps the one Mather had to have so he could find his way back to his concealed car.

But after shooting her husband, Corinne would have been in shock. Emotionally devastated. Perhaps sobbing.

In no condition, even with a gun in one hand and a light in the other, to shepherd an athletic, size forty-four long real estate broker, who certainly wouldn't have gone meekly, through the darkness to his death.

Enter the womanly wisdom of Marvelous Mary:

*"One of these days a couple of them will get together—"*

Corinne had to have help. Already there, waiting outside, because they'd known it would take two of them.

Someone to carry the light so she could grasp that gun with both hands and concentrate on keeping the sights on Mather.

Someone to provide moral support if she had second thoughts, which could easily happen—and now pointing out that if Mather hadn't been blackmailing her, John would still be alive.

Someone who also wanted Mather dead.

And who was also forced to cover up scratched arms and legs afterward.

---

*(continued from page 4)*

years—fruit-picker, jackaroo, worker in a sugar mill, builder of Holden cars. Spent a year on Aborigine Mission in Northern Territory. . . ." In Australia he has won numerous short story awards.

(According to our dictionary, a jackaroo is "a green hand working as an apprentice on a sheep ranch.")

Michael Horenkamp, author

of "The Loss of Danny Rafferty," makes his fiction debut in this issue. Also a journalist, a copy editor for the Lexington *Herald-Leader*, Mr. Horenkamp has put in time as "an assembly line worker, a bus station porter, a waiter in a pizza parlor, and an actor in summer stock. Mostly, however, I have just been a newspaperman." He comes from St. Louis.

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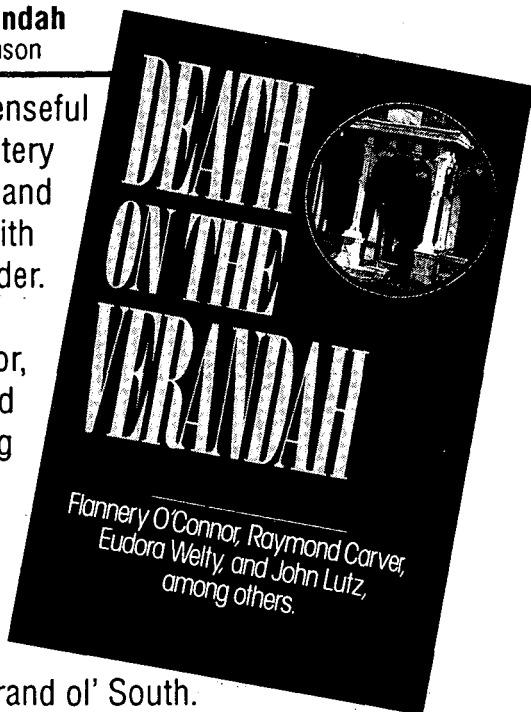


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# THE BAD PATCH

by Neil Jillett



**M**r. North made surprisingly little fuss when Mrs. Bright pushed him off Balmoral Wharf. He grunted irritably when he felt her hand on his back, as if he thought it was meant as an apologetic pat for the row she had started, and he merely squawked when the hand sent him on the nine foot drop into the water.

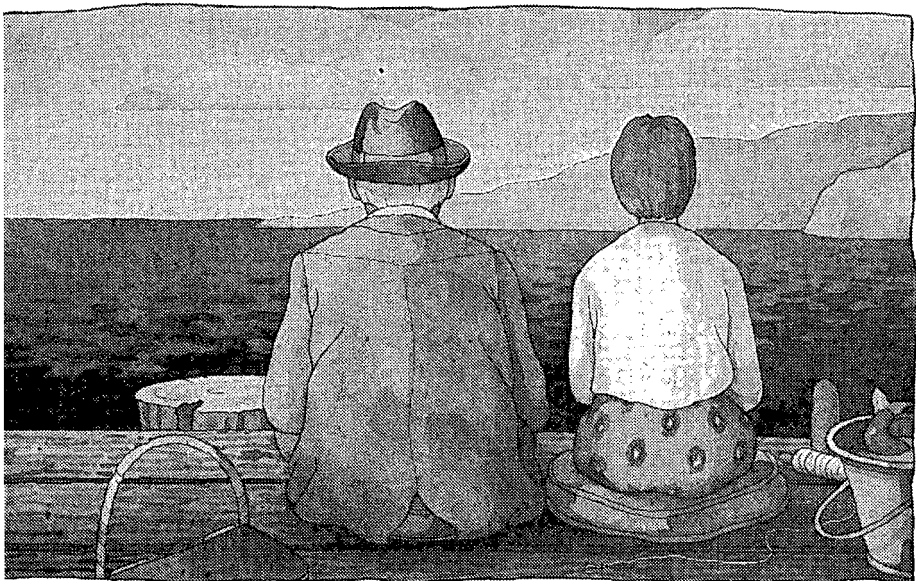
"Get help, you stupid woman," he gurgled as she stared down at him.

Waves sloshed against his open mouth, and he did not manage to repeat the demand. Looking more annoyed than frightened, he flopped his hands about for a minute or so. And then he sank.

Mrs. Bright expected him to pop back to the surface at any moment. She considered going down the steps to the wharf's lower deck, which was almost level with the water, to be ready to stretch out a rescuing arm. But the rudeness of those words, *stupid woman*, on top of everything else he had said, did not inspire such a forgiving act. Anyway, Mr. North did not pop back. His hat, the gray felt that never left his head while he was fishing, rocked on the waves, quickly filling with water, and followed him beneath the surface.

Copyright © 1992 by Neil Jillett. "The Bad Patch" originally appeared in *Ita* magazine, 1992 (Sydney, Australia).

Illustration by Jim Adams



"Good riddance!" said Mrs. Bright. The words, loud enough to startle a seagull that was investigating Mr. North's unguarded fishing basket, had a vehemence that she recognized as being, like that push, quite against her usual character.

She sat down, her legs dangling over the edge of the wharf, and thought about what she had done and what she should do.

She had meant only to teach Mr. North a lesson, to cool him off. It had not occurred to her that he could not swim. The subject had not arisen during the five years of what she must, all things considered, still regard as their friendship. So the fatal outcome of their argument was a shock, though not an unpleasant one. As if to emphasize this point to herself, Mrs. Bright muttered, "Good riddance!" several more times.

She rejected the idea of pushing Mr. North's fishing tackle into the water after him, since a suicide or an accident victim would presumably have left it on the wharf. But she did remove from his basket the good-sized flathead that lay there, wrapped in a wet cloth. It would serve no purpose being allowed to rot. Besides, she had promised the children fish for tea.

"If I'm not here when you get home," she had told them, "I'll probably be down at the wharf."

She said this nearly every day when Daphne and Bruce left for school, even if it looked as if rain had set in.

"Chops again for tea, Mummy?" Daphne, who was thirteen, two years older than Bruce, asked that morning, holding out her hand. She and Bruce, knowing their mother never bothered to keep cupboards stocked, did the shopping after school.

"No, not chops," Mrs. Bright said. "I feel lucky."

This meant it would probably be fish again for the evening meal, but Daphne continued to hold out her hand. "I'll still need money for peas and potatoes."

Mrs. Bright sorted through the change in her purse. "Money, money," she grumbled in her usual dull tone. "I'm sure other people's children aren't always demanding money."

The morning's conversation, a reminder that she must be getting home, came back to Mrs. Bright as she stared at the spot where Mr. North had disappeared. She waited another five minutes, to make sure he did not return to the surface, although in the fast-thickening dusk it would be hard to see him if he did. The poor light seemed to have been her ally; otherwise, surely, people, having seen Mr. North fall, would have rushed to his aid.

Nursing that assumption on the fifteen minute walk home, Mrs. Bright enjoyed the balminess of the autumn evening and the satisfaction of having done what needed to be done, even if it was, to some degree, an accident.

Their mother, as Bruce often giggled to his sister, was hooked on fishing.

"He says it's good for my Bad Patch," Mrs. Bright reminded them after every fortnightly visit to the doctor to renew or change her prescriptions. "The medications seem to settle me down. I'd be so tense and nervy without them. And the fishing."

Her children could see no sign that she was a victim of nerves or tension, conditions that made people bad-tempered and unpredictable. Mrs. Bright was always in the same mood. *My bad patch*, she called it, as if it came and went like a migraine, which it didn't—all her pills made sure of that. She was never really happy or unhappy. She seemed incapable of enthusiasm, let alone excitement. Hints of sadness never deepened into true melancholia. She could grumble in a way that almost removed any sense of complaint from the words, and when she offered praise or affection, there was no underlying warmth.

Sometimes her children wished she would show more interest in them, appear less bored by anything other than fishing, her Bad Patch, and the royal family; behave as mothers were supposed to behave. But they had learnt that the foggy state from which she never seemed to emerge was something they had to live with.

"Maybe her Bad Patch is because of the change," Daphne said as she and her brother walked to school on the day their mother was to kill Mr. North.

"What's the change?"

"Something that happens to ladies around Mummy's age."

"What something?"

"You wouldn't understand," said Daphne, who had been puzzled by an item in "Diary of a Doctor Who Tells" in a women's magazine.

**T**he onset of the Bad Patch coincided with the death of Mrs. Bright's husband and presumably had something to do with it, although she was not consciously distressed to hear that he had died.

At first her slapdash doctor found that she was satisfied to receive new medicine every time she visited him. "These should help to calm you, Mrs. Bright," he would say, though she seemed extraordinarily calm already, or, "This should do the trick."

After three years of fortnightly visits, Mrs. Bright had a vague desire for more interesting treatment. "I know the medication is working marvels, doctor," she said sincerely, "but perhaps I need help in other ways?"

"Knitting can be quite therapeutic," the doctor said, as he did at some stage to all his patients, male and female.

Mrs. Bright, who had hoped he would acknowledge the importance of her Bad Patch by recommending psychiatric consultations, tried unsuccessfully to inject some disappointment and anger into her voice. "I could never follow a pattern, and even if I could, I'd be bound to drop stitches. Besides, it means more sitting down. I get enough of that with the royal family."

"Oh yes, your scrapbooks." Mrs. Bright had often told the doctor of her abiding respect, admiration, and affection for the House of Windsor, in particular Princess Elizabeth, the heir to the throne. "I suppose that is a rather sedentary hobby."

Mrs. Bright could not summon the annoyance to tell him that maintaining, with scissors and paste, a record of British royalty should not be described as a mere hobby; but she gave him what



she hoped was a fairly grim look.

"Well then," said the doctor, "how about watercolor painting? I know of a teacher who has many ladies similar to yourself in his classes." His tone implied that he meant idle bitches who did nothing but complain about having nothing to do.

Mrs. Bright, having failed to recognize the irony or to stifle a yawn, objected. "I don't see myself as the artistic type, trying to make something pretty out of a blue vase and an unripe pear on a check tablecloth."

"Pottery, then?" said the doctor, doing a word association with *vase*.

"All that thumping lumps of mud."

"It's called clay."

"And so messy."

"Well then," said the doctor, writing out two new prescriptions, "why don't you just go fishing?"

The suggestion was meant as an insulting joke, but Mrs. Bright liked the idea of relaxing, on doctor's orders, in the sun. She went straight to a sporting goods shop and bought handlines, hooks and sinkers, and a basket to put them in.

The next morning she strolled to Balmoral Wharf.

"You'll need a cushion, a leather one," said the only other person there, a man she guessed to be somewhere between his late fifties and early seventies. "If you don't want to get splinters you-know-where."

"I should have thought of that."

"Pom, aren't you?" It was more a criticism than a question. "I can always pick you lot by the accent."

"Yes, I am *English*," said Mrs. Bright, who disliked the national nickname that Australians applied so disparagingly to people from the Home Country of the Empire. She wondered whether fishing was such a good idea if this was the type of person likely to be encountered on the wharf.

"I won't hold that against you." The man twisted his fishing line around a bollard and walked across to her. "Now let's see what you've got in that dinky little basket."

"I don't want to put you to any trouble." Mrs. Bright's tone came out haughtier than she intended.

"Don't be silly, woman. If you're going to fish, you may as well do it properly. I'll check your stuff, tell you what else you may need."



"Thank you." It was a long time since a man had spoken so bossily to Mrs. Bright, and she was beginning to enjoy it, after the initial annoyance. The man, she decided, was nearer fifty than seventy and neat and clean; not bad looking, either. She folded her hands as he complimented her on having the good sense to buy handlines instead of a rod ("more nuisance than they're worth") and told her about bait and showed her how to tie on a hook.

"By the way," said Mrs. Bright's new acquaintance, "the name's North."

**M**rs. Bright decided it must be the salt air and the sunlight, working with various Bad Patch pills, that made her talk so freely to Mr. North.

Over the next few months she told him how she had grown up, shy and awkward, in a middle-class London household, worked as a typist, and looked after her widowed father; how, after his death, she had come to Sydney in search of warmer weather and perhaps romance.

"I hadn't believed that scare talk about Germany," she said, "and when war started, just after I arrived here, I felt so guilty, abandoning dear Mother England in her darkest hours. Not like our brave royal family, who stayed in London even when Buckingham Palace was bombed."

"That's the sort of thing they're paid to do," Mr. North muttered.

Mrs. Bright, hoping that her ears had deceived her, said, "But I have to be honest and say I was relieved, too, to be away from danger. And I love this climate."

She stretched her arms in the sunshine, pretending not to notice Mr. North's glance at the way the buttons of her cotton dress strained against her bust. Is it possible, she thought, though not very confidently, that he's not even fifty?

"Have any trouble finding work when you came here?" Mr. North asked, hauling in another mackerel.

"I don't seem to be able to tempt them." Mrs. Bright enviously admired the striped fish, his tenth that day.

"Try a slightly bigger hook. So did you get a job?"

"At the *Herald*, taking down classified advertisements over the telephone," Mrs. Bright said, changing hooks. "That's where I met Stuart. He was deputy head clerk of the department."

To Stuart Bright, a confidently charming man of twenty-eight, four years her junior, the shyness behind her rather grand manner

was as much a challenge as her virginity. Although she deplored his accent as well as his taste in ties, she was flattered by his attentions. They were married three months after they met.

"We were never really suited," Mrs. Bright told Mr. North. "He was a man of very limited interests and narrow horizons. Soon after Bruce was born, we went our separate ways."

A few days later, wanting to hear more about those separate ways, Mr. North said sympathetically, "Divorce can be a messy business."

"Oh, we never got round to that." Mrs. Bright's languid laugh might have been mistaken for a sigh. "He just left. Then he joined the navy. He was killed in some sort of accident on the last day of the war." She gave a genuine sigh, without suggesting much sorrow.

"Tough luck for him." Mr. North realized that no more sympathy was expected. "Get out your lightest line and smallest hook," he ordered, interpreting a distant flurry on the water. "I reckon we're going to get a run of gars."

Obedient with the speed and neatness he had taught her, Mrs. Bright said, "Of course, I'd told the children he was already dead."

"Of course." Mr. North had learnt that acting as an echo kept her talking when she got into something that promised to be especially interesting.

"I thought it was for the best. He'd made it clear he wasn't any more interested in the children than he was in me." Mrs. Bright felt a faint twitch on her line. She responded, as Mr. North had shown her, with a flick of the wrist. "Lovely sweet eating," she said as she landed the slim, sharp-nosed garfish, "but those fine bones are so fiddly."

"Try grilling them fast on a high heat," Mr. North said. "It frees the flesh. But what about money?"

"Stuart was very good on that score, I must admit. Not generous exactly. He couldn't afford to be on the wages he got at the *Herald* or in the navy, but it was adequate, paid regularly through a solicitor."

"Then there's insurance, I suppose, and the pension?"

"Just as well, since the tiny nest egg Daddy left me went, years ago. Our little family gets by, but it can be a struggle. I do wish my health was good enough to let me take a job."

"I wouldn't advise it," Mr. North said, "not with your Bad Patch. And what would I do for company if you shut yourself up in an office all day?"

"You managed quite well before," Mrs. Bright said, almost spiritedly. She could tell he was in one of his flirty moods and she tried to play along with them, mainly as payment for the fishing lessons, though it was a bit of fun, too.

After they had all known each other for a year Mr. North began to call her Lorna, without asking permission. He felt entitled to take the liberty, she supposed, since he was older than she was (by how much she still did not know), but it raised the question of what she should call him.

"North's fine," he said.

"I already do."

"I mean drop the Mister."

"I can't call you North, just North. It sounds rude."

"That or nothing," said Mr. North. "I don't like any of my names. Wouldn't give 'em to a dog."

Mrs. Bright thought for a moment. "Then I'll call you Syd. Short for Sydney."

"All right, but only when we're alone. I wouldn't want the others calling me that."

He meant the other six regulars at the wharf, all oldish men, none of them as regular as Mr. North and Mrs. Bright, who both went fishing at least four times a week.

Mr. North and Mrs. Bright, usually sitting side by side, were rarely drawn into conversation with these others—the less regular regulars. Nor did Mrs. Bright share in the gossip about Mr. North that was swapped among the other fishermen when he was not there. But she did eavesdrop, although without learning anything she did not already know.

Mr. North had been fishing at Balmoral for twenty years. Mrs. Bright knew that some illness, no longer evident, had caused his early retirement from what he called a "job in the city." No one had any idea why he would not reveal his real names or the exact location of the boarding house where he lived in North Sydney. This inner suburb, thirty minutes by tram from Balmoral, had provided his false surname and inspired Mrs. Bright to christen him Syd.

He told her that as an orphan he had been raised on an uncle's wheat farm before joining the army during World War I. He even mentioned, in a rare mood, confessional as well as anecdotal, that he had been jilted twice. "Never felt like asking anyone else after

that. Sort of robbed me of my confidence. Reckon that's why I'm a bit on the quiet side."

"You certainly weren't shy when you introduced yourself to me," Mrs. Bright said.

"Impulse overcoming nature and habit."

"What a lovely way of putting it. I do like a nice turn of phrase."

Mr. North felt himself blush, although it did not register on his weather-reddened face. "I hadn't talked to a woman for years, apart from my landlady and girls behind the counter in shops. Reckoned it was now or never with you."

The intimacy of this exchange tempted Mrs. Bright to trespass on what she suspected was forbidden ground. "What's your real name, Syd?"

"Can't a man have some bloody privacy?" Mr. North shouted, and wound in his line, gathered his gear, and left without saying goodbye.

It was a week before he returned to the wharf. He and Mrs. Bright pretended there had been no display of bad temper, and she never again asked his name.

**M**rs. Bright was not sure whether she should be annoyed or flattered when Daphne and Bruce referred to Mr. North as her boyfriend.

"Don't be silly, you two," she said, in her usual non-committal tone. "He's old enough to be my father."

"If he was ten when you were born," Daphne guessed, with more accuracy than she realized.

"He's not much of a catch," Bruce said. He was pleased with his joke, but not happy with the thought of Mr. North as a replacement for the father he could not remember.

Bruce and Daphne occasionally went to the wharf on their way for a swim at the Balmoral baths. Mr. North tried to be friendly, but he found talking to children even more difficult than talking to adults. In spite of his offer to teach them fishing, which they politely declined, Bruce and Daphne decided Mr. North was a grump.

"Fancy wearing a tie and a suit to go fishing!" Daphne said.

"It's a sports coat," Bruce corrected her. "Do you think we'd still be able to sell his fish if she married him?"

"He looks mean as well as grumpy," Daphne said. "He'd probably want all the money."

"So we'd have to say we sell it a lot cheaper than we do, and keep most of the money."

"I'm not sure we should do that." Daphne pretended that her brother had suggested something new. Being the elder, she felt obliged not to admit to a willingness to lie and cheat.

Mrs. Bright often came home from the wharf with most of Mr. North's catch as well as her own. His landlady did not like fish, and he had no one else to give it to. "If you and the kids can't get through it all," he told Mrs. Bright, "pass it on to your friends." She was almost as friendless as he was, but that was not among the many things she had told him about herself.

After a day when the yellowtail and leatherjacket had been biting especially well, Mrs. Bright dumped several smelly pounds on the kitchen table.

"Not fish for tea again, Mummy!"

"It's only the third time this week," Mrs. Bright said.

"But it's only Wednesday," Bruce complained. "And we can't eat all that."

"Give it to people who have cats. You must know people who have cats. Boys always do."

"Can we sell it to them?" Bruce asked, totting up in his head the neighbors who had cats.

"People will think I've sent you out begging," Mrs. Bright said.

On the principle that anything short of a firm no was a yes, Bruce persuaded Daphne to help him establish a market for Mr. North's fish. The money they made was enough to pay for weekend canoe rides from the boat shed at Balmoral and for their favorite comic books. Sometimes there was enough over to buy a women's magazine for their mother, if it had an article about the royal family.

One day she passed on to Mr. North the interesting fact, noted in one of the magazines, that King George personally pruned the roses at Sandringham as well as Windsor.

"Never had much time for gardening," Mr. North said.

Something in his tone told Mrs. Bright that it was the king rather than gardening that Mr. North had little time for. She found this hard to believe, as she had never met anyone who was not fascinated by the doings of King George VI and his family. But, Mrs. Bright recalled sadly, Mr. North had grunted or appeared inattentive on other occasions that she had mentioned royalty.

Despite this reprehensibly un-British attitude in a citizen of a country that had long been a part of the Empire, Mrs. Bright did her best to avoid annoying Mr. North. He was, after all, about the only friend she had. She did not want to do anything that might disturb the companionable days that were doing so much to keep her Bad Patch under control. But it was not long after reaching this sensible decision that she slipped up.

"I often wonder," she said one day in 1950, looking across the harbor as it sparkled under mild winter sunshine, "how this place came to be named after that other Balmoral, which is quite a distance from the sea."

Caught unawares, Mr. North asked, "What other Balmoral?"

"In Scotland, where the royal family's favorite residence, Balmoral Castle, is. You know, the one Prince Albert bequeathed to Queen Victoria."

"I should bloody well hope there's no connection between that place and this." Mr. North did not apologize for his swearing, although he had nearly always done so before, even for damn and blast. He stood up and packed his gear. "I'm off."

He stayed away from the wharf so long that Mrs. Bright wondered whether she would ever see him again. But when he did return, nearly three weeks later, he was apologetic. He gave an embarrassed grin as he sat down beside her. She thought how young—indeed, how boyishly attractive—it made him look.

"Sorry, Lorna," he said, "I shouldn't have flown off the handle like that. And the language!"

"Just a silly little tiff between friends, Syd."

"I'm glad you feel that way, Lorna." By this time Mr. North, who had been automatically rummaging in his basket and getting things together, had a line in the water. "But, well . . . could we come to an agreement?" When Mrs. Bright looked puzzled, he added, "About the royal family."

Mrs. Bright could not think of anything to say except "Oh?"

"I don't like talking about them."

"You don't have republican sympathies, Syd?" Mrs. Bright's voice had a tone, a hint of anxiety, Mr. North had not heard before.

"Of course not, Lorna, none at all," he lied.

"You don't believe Australia should sever its connections with the crown? To stop acknowledging the king as head of state?"

"Of course not," Mr. North lied again. "It's just that I don't find that royalty stuff all that interesting."



Mr. North's views were now exposed as far worse than Mrs. Bright could ever have imagined. For a few moments she said nothing, stunned by his straight talk. Then she remembered how much she valued his companionship, how she had told herself, weeks ago, that royalty was probably a topic to be avoided. But she tried to put some reproach into her voice as she said, "Not another word will I say on the subject. I'd hate to think you ever found my conversation boring."

"Of course I don't, you silly girl." He gave that attractive grin again. "How've they been biting while I've been away?"

**T**he death of George VI in February 1952 did not cause any immediate trouble between Mr. North and Mrs. Bright. For several days, out of respect for the royal family's grief, Mrs. Bright did not go fishing. When she returned to Balmoral Wharf, Mr. North mumbled, "I'm sorry, Lorna, about, you know

"Thanks, Syd." Mrs. Bright gave a bright smile and one of her almost-sighs, then moved the conversation onto a safe topic. "Any chance of the flathead biting today, do you think?"

Not once that year did either of them refer even in the most indirect way to the new Queen Elizabeth. But a few months into 1953 Mrs. Bright could tell that her friend was under strain. The newspapers and radio bulletins were full of the preparations for the coronation in Westminster Abbey in June, to be followed by the first visit to Australia by a reigning monarch. Mrs. Bright occasionally caught Mr. North muttering under his breath. As the mutterings became louder and more frequent, she was unable to ignore the fact that they concerned Her Majesty and His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. The general drift of this muttering was unfavorable, but for some time, by moving to the other side of the wharf or going home, Mrs. Bright protected herself against picking up the particular sentiments.

"Sorry about that, Lorna," Mr. North would usually say, at the time or a few days later. "But all this carry-on about—"

"Please, Syd! No more. Remember our agreement."

For a few weeks he observed it, but in May, with the coronation only days away, he resumed his muttering. Mrs. Bright was prepared to be charitable, to put it down to the effects of his having sat in the sun for so many years—he was looking and sounding much older—and the possibility that he had some Irish in his an-

cestry, which would explain, though not excuse, his unnatural animosity towards the English royal family. But she also resented his failure to apologize any more for his muttering, and she wondered whether she should stay away from the wharf until after the coronation, when he would presumably be over the worst of his dreadful condition.

Worried about what to do, Mrs. Bright forgot her pills one day. Mr. North, having observed her unusually lively manner for several hours, said as evening approached, "Haven't seen you take any of your pills today."

"Nor I have," she said in surprise. "I'd better catch up." She hunted through her handbag, her fishing basket, and the pockets of her cardigan. "First time I've forgotten them in all these years, but I feel fine." She smiled at Mr. North. "Seems I can get on quite well without them, for a few hours, anyway."

Mr. North, far from feeling fine, had been grumbling all day, quietly enough for Mrs. Bright to pretend that she did not know he was railing against the cost to Australian taxpayers of the post-coronation royal visit. Now, as the sun set and his voice grew louder, Mrs. Bright could feel her blood boiling—or at least, in her unpilled condition, coming to an approximation of a simmer. She could not remember when she had last felt an emotion so strongly.

"The Russians had the right idea," Mr. North said, so loudly that Mrs. Bright had a dreadful sense of where his monologue was heading. She began to wind in her line. She would not be a party to disloyalty by staying around to hear treason.

"The Russians had the right idea all right," Mr. North repeated challengingly. "Put their so-called royal family up against a wall and shot them, shot the lot of them."

Mrs. Bright could hardly control the trembling of her hands as, from force of habit, she detached the unnibbled bait from the hook and finished winding her line.

"Shot them!" Mr. North shouted. "That's what the Russians did with the bloody House of Romanov. And it's about time we had enough sense to do the same with the House of bloody . . ."

Before he could say Windsor, Mrs. Bright pushed him off the wharf.

His body turned up three days later, wedged between rocks on a small headland several hundred yards from the wharf. Police said there were no suspicious circumstances. A week later Mrs.

Bright received a letter asking her to visit a solicitor representing an Albert George Windsor. This trebly royal name turned out to belong to the man whom Mrs. Bright had known as Syd North. Apart from a few small bequests to his landlady and to charities, Mr. Windsor had left his entire estate, valued at six hundred seventy-five thousand pounds, to Mrs. Lorna Bright.

"Oh my God," she said, and went immediately to North Sydney Police Station.

"I want to confess to the murder of a local resident," she told the desk sergeant.

"If I could have your name and address, madam," the sergeant said, and when he had taken them, he introduced her to a C.I.D. inspector.

"Now what's this all about?" the inspector demanded impatiently. He had spent the week dealing with nutcases, and from the glint in her eye, this one threatened to be the nuttiest. "You know," he said when she had finished her story, "nearly every time there's a death involving violence, or apparently involving it, we get someone coming in to claim they did it."

"I'm not claiming," Mrs. Bright said; "I'm confessing."

"Let me put it this way," said the inspector. "What would be your reaction if someone said they'd committed murder because of some slight to the royal family?"

"A threat to shoot the royal family is more than a slight, surely?"

"That's as may be. But what would your response be?"

"I would believe them, of course."

"Sex and money are the only motives we work on here." The inspector smirked. "As for sex, I assume . . ."

"Don't be impertinent," Mrs. Bright said. "But he did leave me all that money."

"Which you've already said wasn't a motive."

"And wouldn't have been even if I had known about it at the time, which I didn't. I would hate you to think that I am the sort of person who goes around killing people for their money."

"Though you did push him, you say?"

"Yes. How many times must I tell you?"

"But no one's come forward to say they saw you do it."

"It was late in the evening, almost dark."

"A witness would help back up your story."

"You mean I have to prove my own guilt?" Mrs. Bright demanded.

"That's about the size of it," the inspector said. But to be on the safe side, and at Mrs. Bright's suggestion, he went to see her doctor.

After some insincere harrumphing about patient-physician confidentiality, the doctor said, "The mildest form of violence would be completely beyond her. She's incapable of stirring up enough energy even to contemplate it."

Although Mrs. Bright confessed again, at the inquest, the coroner found that Albert George Windsor had died accidentally, with no evidence to suggest foul play or suicide.

Mrs. Bright, whose Bad Patch had now become very bad indeed, was admitted into psychiatric care. She was released three months later, after she had been weaned off the array of sedatives her former doctor had prescribed and when she stopped confessing to murder or manslaughter. Back in the world beyond psychotherapy, she learnt to appreciate the changes of mood that coincided with the end of her Bad Patch and to enjoy being rich. As a mark of gratitude to her benefactor she founded the Balmoral Branch of the fledgling Australian Republican Association.

More than forty years later, Bruce and Daphne are still sure, as they were at the time, that their mother was speaking the truth when she claimed to have killed Mr. North, but as heirs to the fortune that she has increased hugely, they are not insensitive enough to say so.

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FICTION

# UP THE HILL

by Robert Halsted



Illustration by Hank Blaustein

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“**H**ow much farther to Primrose Lea?” asked Sergeant Codleigh, puffing from unwonted exercise.

“Round the next turnin’, sir,” answered the boy who was guiding him, excited in his brief importance. “Just under Stonecap Hill yonder.”

They trudged onward a way, and then just past a rise in the ground they saw a caravan standing on the level of the lea, a tethered horse grazing nearby. “Thank you, m’lad,” said the sergeant. “I shan’t be needing you any longer.” He pulled a copper from his pocket, handed it to the boy, and went on to the caravan. The boy loitered by the hedgerow, hoping for another commission.

A motley dog ran from under the van and announced him. A pale wan woman with thin fair hair, slightly built save for a belly swollen with child, came to the door. Her eyes were red from weeping.

“Mrs. Tinker?” asked the sergeant. She sniffled, nodded, and held the door for him. “I regret to intrude on your grief and distress, but as you may know, the Crown requires a complete report . . .” He let the statement dwindle away. While he waited for a reply, he glanced round the room at the pathetic little efforts to make the place home-

like: a tumbler of wilting wild-flowers on the kitchen dresser, scenes from the illustrated papers stuck to the walls, a daguerreotype somehow afforded showing a family group, a fair couple surrounded by fair children and one dark one. The woman might have been Mrs. Tinker’s younger sister, or herself ten years before.

“Twon’t do no good, reports’ll never bring ’im back.”

“Nonetheless, Mrs. Tinker,” Codleigh pressed with gentle firmness, “it has to be done. If you’ll just tell me briefly what you know of this sad business, I’ll make my report and shan’t bother you further.”

“Well, I’d sent ’im and ’is sister out for washin’-up water. They was gone longwhiles, then she run back in ayellin’ he’d fell an’ hurt ’is head. So I run out with ’er, and there ’e was, pore mite, at the bottom o’ the hill—” She subsided into quiet sobbing; Codleigh held his tongue.

A voice came from behind the dingy curtain that screened off the back part of the caravan’s interior, and a head peered around it. “I say, is that you, sergeant?”

“Oh, hullo, Dr. Clark. I didn’t know you’d already got here.”

“Yes, I’m treating the girl now, the elder sister of the . . . deceased.”



"How is she?"

"All considered, not bad. Contusions and lacerations, no bones broken."

Codleigh pondered a moment. "I wonder, d'you suppose she might be able to give me an account of the affair without undue strain?"

The girl half answered the question herself by sticking her head round the curtain. She was a lumpy, unprepossessing child of nine or so, all the less attractive for the strips of court-plaster on her nutbrown face and bits of dry heather clinging to her matted dark hair. Codleigh recognized the dark child in the picture, a couple of years older.

Dr. Clark lifted the curtain aside and stepped past the child. "She's physically able to take you there, and I daresay it would do her good, get back in the saddle as soon as she's thrown, so to speak." He turned to the girl. "Miss Gillian, do you think you could take the police gentleman out and show him what happened?"

"Aye, I'll take 'im," she responded with unsmiling alacrity, and moved toward the door with a glance at her mother at the table, whose head was bowed down onto her arms.

They stepped out the door for greater privacy, for their busi-

ness and her grief. Codleigh cleared his throat. "You've already viewed, er, the remains?" he asked Clark.

"First thing I did, naturally," the doctor replied with the slightest tinge of asperity. "There's a man standing by the body. You'll see him out there. And now I think I must treat the bereft mother. A nerve draught, perhaps, though whatever I do now is mere placebo . . ."

Codleigh had totally lost the medical man's attention, which was well enough for the nonce; their conference needed to await his own investigation. "Would you show me how it happened, Gillian?" He held his hand out, but she was already looking over her shoulder to see that he was following.

She stayed a couple of paces ahead as she led him round the foot of the hill. He glanced back at the caravan.

"Tell me, Gillian," he began conversationally. "I see your wagon is rigged out with a doubletree, but I see only one horse."

"M' da's out on t'other 'orse. He's thatchin' t'day. 'E works at mendin', but custom's been slow, 'e takes what 'e can get."

So that explained the missing man as well as the missing horse, Codleigh thought. He

watched her sturdy legs pumping along under the short skirt, nearly up to her knees. She wore no shoes or stockings, and looked as if she rarely did; her tough, splayed little feet gripped the ground surely as a goat's.

"Are you folk just come to these parts, Gillian? I don't recall seeing your caravan here before."

"Aye, my da was workin' Westshire, round about Fairham and Kingsley. Custom slack'd off, we come over this-away."

Handy, thought Codleigh, to carry your job in your pocket and move to where the business is. No need, at least, to do that in police work . . . a fragmentary memory came to him, some report he had had from Westshire not too far back.

"Just the four of you in the family, then?" he asked offhandedly. That had struck him as odd: most tinkers and itinerants he had noticed had young ones splitting the seams of their 'vans. They having so few other recreations was how he saw it.

"Aye. Nay. Just us now. Mary, she 'us a little older'n me, and then the babby. They died."

"Oh. Sorry."

"T'sall right." She didn't sound grieving.

Over the next little rise he saw a man half leaning, half sitting on a tall boulder. By the boulder a coat had been spread over a small humped-up object. As they approached, he saw that the man was Tom Piper, a small farmer who scrabbled along on a few stony acres of freehold and, by rumor, eked out his thin harvests with occasional thefts of chickens and piglets.

It would take a longer-legged copper than Codleigh to catch him redhanded, but someday there might be a witness.

"Heigh, Tom," Codleigh called. Tom silently waved in response. He looked a trifle uneasy; probably, thought the sergeant, he had never stood a deathwatch before. "I've come to view the evidence. You needn't look, Gillian," he added over his shoulder as he knelt to pull the coat back.

She paid him no heed but edged in behind him to watch. Instead of looking at the small corpse as he uncovered it, he watched her face sidelong. He saw there what he feared he would, not the pain, shock, and horror he would have preferred.

Codleigh turned his eyes back to the dead boy. Young John Tinker had been a pretty child. The once rosy cheeks had gone pallid, the half open sky-

blue eyes dulled, and the lips now nearer grey than red, but you could tell. The golden curls were incarnadined by now-darkening blood, and the policeman looked briefly at the concave fracture on the crown of his skull. He had been better washed, better dressed than his sister. It was easy to see who had been the favored child.

"Has the body been moved?" he asked Tom.

The farmer shook his head. "Nay, not since I come. Far as I know, they found 'im here."

Codleigh nodded and bent back to the task. Ever so gently he lifted the little head—Jacky must have been about seven—looked close at the deep wound and the little smear of blood on the rock behind it, looked at the hard sheep-cropped turf where the head had lain. He saw in one little clenched hand a few filaments of dark hair; he opened the still-supple fingers of the other and saw on the palm a couple of deep punctures and a long gash, congealed blood around them. He grunted, nodded, or shook his head, and covered the body back up.

"Now, where did he fall from?" he asked the girl. Gillian pointed to where the brow of the hill, a shelf of limestone that gave the hill its name, overhung the steep slope. Yes,

it was possible; a falling object reasonably could hit partway down the hillside, roll, and come to rest here. "Take me up there if you would. The easy way, please."

She led him up the slope, skipping from rock to rock and skirting round bushes like a frolicking kid as he followed with shortening breath. The cap of the hill sloped back the far way, and the brow on the near side was actually a stair-stepped stack of shelves beetling out over a sort of shepherd's lee. Codleigh sat on the top ledge to catch his breath before venturing down to the dropoff.

"We 'us standin' there when 'e fell over," Gillian said, pointing to a spot on the lower shelf. "I tried t' catch 'im, that's how I fell, too." Her fall, though, had not been so hard. She slipped down the edge of the top shelf, nimbly pranced over to the brink. "'Twas right here, anext this gorse bush. 'E was alookin' over an' got too clost."

That, then, was whence the punctures in his palm had come. He could have held onto the bush with his left hand, reached out to grasp her with his right . . . but no, the right palm was punctured, the left clasped the threads of hair. The answer settled into sickening finality in the pit of Codleigh's stomach.

He took a deep breath and clambered down to where the child was standing. He found it a rather dizzying prospect; the hill, though hardly a hundred feet high, sloped sharply. A wrong move could amount to a drop from the top of a tall house. Knowing that a sudden touch of vertigo could be his undoing, he sat down firmly well back from the edge and surveyed the scene below him: the boulder with nervous Piper and dead Jacky clustered beside it; farther down, an oaken pail with its single hoop slipped, staves sprung out and the bail torn off one post—doubtless the one they had brought with them; and back down the lane the way he had come up, a small party of men on foot.

His thoughts went back to the pail, and the question came to him that he should have thought of long before. "Jill," he said quietly. "How long have you been fetching water for the family? Four, five years perhaps?"

"Thereabouts, I reckon," she answered in a slightly puzzled tone.

"In all those years, how many times have you found water at the top of a dry hill?"

Jill gave no immediate answer, though he could almost hear the thoughts turning in her cunning little head. While

he waited for an answer, the party arrived at the scene. One of them, a gaunt labor-hardened man with curling hair the color and shape of a fresh-laid haycock, went forward, reluctantly pulled back the coat, knelt down with his face in his hands. Certainly Jack's father.

Just then Codleigh heard a bird call down in the water meadow where she should have gone for the water. "Did you ever hear a cuckoo sing, Jill?"

"Aye-ee." Still puzzled.

"D'you know about the cuckoo, Jill? It hatches in another bird's nest. It grows and grows, and shoves out all the other little birds, to fall down and die on the ground. The mum bird and the dad bird feed their worst foe, and have no young of their own left."

The back of his neck was prickling now. He had got in over his depth without quite knowing why, now he had no idea how to get back safely, nor knew what she was doing behind him. The only way to go, then, was forward, still not knowing wherefore nor whither nor how.

With studied and insincere offhandedness he rose and strolled to the brink. He sat down by the gorse bush and cautiously leaned over the edge: not too bad a fall; if a man dropped straight down it might

be ten or twelve feet. If he could grasp the overhang and swing into the lee of it, hardly his own height. And he might need to know that.

Codleigh looked through the sparse early spring foliage of the gorse bush for a possible handhold. Near the base of it the stems of the branches were smooth enough not to tear up a man's hands if he had to grab onto it. His breath was coming quicker and shorter now.

One question still unanswered, and he saw the answer before he asked it; under the bush was a sizable stone, darkly stained on one face, with flies buzzing about and lighting upon it.

"So this is the stone, is it, Jill? The one that broke Jack's crown before he went tumbling down?"

That was the trigger. He heard the rush of her bare feet on the rough ground behind him, and at the last instant he folded himself and cringed into the prickly bush.

He heard the warning shout from below—they must have been watching all the while—just as her foot and hip struck him on the way past.

Jill didn't linger on the brink, rather plummeted. Had she let go of the heavy stone, she would not have fallen so far out and thus lower down the

hill, but she held on and flew in an arc out over the slope. He heard the thud of the stone on the hard-tufted hill, and the snap of her neck, an instant after he saw the impact. She bounced once, skidded down the hillside a ways, and came to rest with her head tucked behind her left shoulder.

Romish superstition or not, he crossed himself, then sat there shivering for a moment before he dared put any weight on his legs. The others were still down at the boulder, perhaps paralyzed with shock, perhaps not daring to get close to what must be the Devil's work.

Codleigh circled over the shelf and betook himself on shaking legs down the hillside as directly as he could go, half running and half sliding. When he got to her, no close look was required. The others had now broken out of their stasis, and two men were climbing up to him. He saw that one was Stephen Whinney the coroner, conveniently to hand.

Puffing from the climb, Whinney said, "The lass seemed to go plumb daft!"

"Aye," replied Codleigh. "Doubtless the shock of seeing her brother killed—I should have been wiser than to ask the child to help me." He fixed Whinney's eye with his own.

"Very hard on the family, two accidental deaths in one day."

Whinney, undisposed to letting the police dictate his verdicts, nonetheless caught his meaning and gave him a curt nod. "With the police and coroner as witnesses, I think we needn't trouble the doctor to come to the scene."

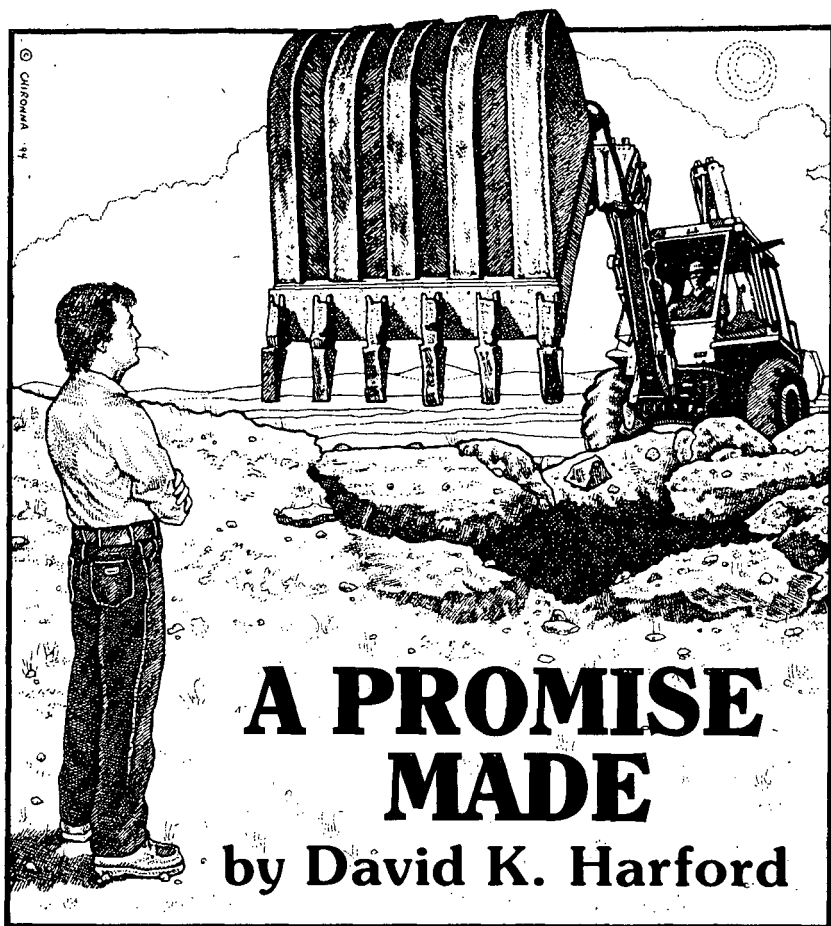
Bill Tinker was still in shock, and closing hours or no closing hours, Codleigh persuaded the landlord of the Rose and Thorn to break the law for the sake of the law and let them in the back door.

After half his pint of bitter, Tinker found his tongue. "I knowed all 'long, kept tellin' myself 'twa'n't so. Till they told me little Jacky was dead." Codleigh nodded and kept his silence. After a long wait Tinker went on: "Annabel, she . . ." He went quiet again. Another minute, and he went on: "She run off on me. Then weeks later she

come back to me, beat all black an' blue, beggin' me to take her back. I forgive her and taken her in. Then when the babby come, I knowed 'twa'n't mine. I tried to treat it like one o' my own, but I never could feel the same 'bout her. Reckon a good part of it's my own fault."

"Lord knows there's been punishment for everybody's sins, and there's none of us blame free," Codleigh replied with all the quiet authority he could put into his voice. Then after a pause he added, "There's the two of you now, and the little one coming on. This one will be safe, and there's a new beginning for you."

Tinker drained his mug. "Aye." He wiped his lips on the back of his wrist and tried on a wry smile. "Well, I reckon I got t' thatch that roof or we don't eat this week." Codleigh left two sixpences on the table, followed him out the door, and went to write his report.



**N**o doubt, it was hot out in that field with no shade trees; but not as hot as I remember the summer of 1972 being, the summer they found Emma Lou Johnston. It was terrible hot that year.

Actually, they never really found Emma Lou. All Dad was ever able to find of the young woman was three fingertips lopped off below the first knuckle. But there was enough blood pooled



throughout her house that it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out Emma Lou's shenanigans had brought her to an unkind end.

A brutal end.

It was and still is the most brutal killing this northwestern area of Pennsylvania ever witnessed. Emma Lou Johnston's murder was and still is unsolved.

So here I was twenty-two years later suffering under the same kind of droughtlike heat as in 1972, standing in a shadeless field, sucking on a blade of grass. From a safe distance I watched Sam King operate his backhoe. His flesh was pinkish, and thick beads of sweat trickled down around his neck, then slid down the thick wrinkles of skin before dripping into the hairy V of his chest beneath his shirt. I swear to God there was more moisture on Sam's face than there was in the ground.

He stopped his machine and lowered the front bucket so it sat firmly on the dusty overturned soil he'd just dug up. He lowered the rear bucket, set it firmly on the ground, and shut down the machine. Swiveling around in the cab of his backhoe with only the dry wind blowing between us, he said to me, "You know, Tommy, if you were to tell me just why we're digging here, it might speed things up. When I dig, I'm used to knowing what I'm digging for." He wiped his face dry with his hanky.

"Want something cold to drink, Sam?" I asked him.

"Yes. Something cold would be good." He stepped down from the backhoe and ambled my way. "But I also want to know what we're doing here. You ain't planting nothing."

"Let's walk over to the house. I got stuff in the fridge."

"You ain't building nothing. There's no water, gas, or oil lines in this field." He visually estimated the distance between where we were and my house. He couldn't actually see my house, or any house for that matter, because we were situated in a big dip in the field. "So tell me, what are we digging for?"

"We're looking for the body of Emma Lou Johnston," I said, making it sound like that was something everyone did every day.

"Here? Awww, Jesus," he threw his hat at the ground. "You ain't picking up where your old man, bless his soul, left off, are you? It would have killed him, you know. Trying to solve that murder would have killed him if he hadn't gotten what he got that killed him anyway." To which he quickly added an obligatory "bless his soul." "You fixing to let it kill you, too. Let it be, Tommy. Let it be."

"I've got a promise to him to fulfill," was all I could say.

Even though he was a longtime family friend, like most folks in this rural area are good friends, Sam didn't seem very pleased with me, and I was afraid he'd get so disgusted he'd load his backhoe onto his flatbed truck and leave me to go back out in the field to dig hard dirt by hand with a pick and shovel. He shoved his cold soda can across the table in my direction.

"I think I figured out after all these years who it was that butchered Emma Lou," I told him, sipping from my own can.

"Everyone from your daddy to the state police to the FBI, and more recently *Unsolved Mysteries*, couldn't figure that murder out. You telling me that you, who was what, five years old—"

"Seven."

"Okay, seven years old when it happened, you figured it out?"

"Yup."

"Awwwww, Jesus." If he'd had his hat on, he'd have been throwing it at my kitchen floor. Sam was real hard on hats. "I hoped when your daddy died, this whole thing would finally die."

"Well, it's not dead, and it won't die until we find not only Emma Lou's remains but her killer, too."

"What makes you think you can do that?"

"Let me explain it to you, would you? Then you can decide for yourself, after I've spoke my piece, whether you want to go back out there and dig or just pack up and leave."

Sam King squinted from my cool, shady kitchen out into the glaring sunlight where just thinking about stepping back out in the heat made my skin crawl and itch. It was midday, the hottest part of the day, hotter than a blast furnace.

I think it was the heat outside that made Sam stay around and listen. Wasn't pay, I know. He wasn't charging me nothing.

When, after a bit, Sam didn't say anything, I took that to mean I should commence my narration, starting with the afternoon Dad got the call at the sheriff's office from Rob Levinson that he'd better come out to the Johnston place. One of them, if not both, was dead. And it was bad, a very shaken and nervous Levinson told Dad, very bad.

I'd been playing outside most of the morning that day; trying to catch newts and crawfish and fingering chubs in a stream too dry to hold life. In spots where I used to plop down in the water and wet my bottom good, there was now only a trickle of water running,

hardly enough to cover the tops of my tennis shoes. That's how hot it was that summer.

So I'd been out most of the morning playing in the creek, cooling off, playing with the neighbor kids until it was time for Aunt Meg to come fetch me, as she did every day while Dad was at work. Aunt Meg is my dead mother's sister.

Dad had told me earlier to stop over to Hank Byerly's at the farm abutting our land and invite him to dinner with us that evening, since Rita Byerly had been down in Clearfield visiting her sister most of the week.

Sam interrupted me. "You can remember all that this clearly? From way back then?" There was sharp skepticism in his voice.

"Oh, yeah. I remember," I told him.

The reason I remember that particular day is not only was Emma Lou Johnston found thought-to-be-dead that day, which was the biggest thing to hit McKean County in years, but it was also the last time I ever saw good old Hank Byerly alive. The next day that big pile of pole logs he kept for firewood rolled over on him and crushed him, and he'd lain there for days until Rita finally came home from Clearfield and found him outside near the barn. Things like that help a young kid remember and remember clearly.

So there I was ambling along, kicking up dust across Hank's driveway, heading towards his barn to invite him over for dinner. Suddenly I saw Hank inside the barn on his backhoe, bringing it out. The front bucket was raised a bit, and I remember him raising it higher to the point that he nearly clipped the huge barn door overhead beam with it as he was coming out. I hurried towards him, filled with excitement and anticipation; a big, powerful machine like that can make a seven-year-old knee-high-to-everything feel excited.

Parking the machine outside, he kept the front bucket raised while he laid out the long arm of the back bucket so it was stretched full length across the ground like the extended tail of a scorpion.

Right off, I asked Hank if he'd give me "ups and downs." Ups and downs was a game we played. I'd get in the front bucket, and he'd raise and lower it to give me a tummy-tickling ride better than any I got at the fairgrounds. I kept looking up at that raised front bucket, wishing he'd lower it so I could climb in.

But Hank, who was starting to grease the fittings on the back bucket, told me there'd be no ups and downs that day. He was in a hurry, he said. He had to get his machine up to Bitter Creek

because Eric Goodnoe's water line, buried from his spring to his house, had broke and the Goodnoes were losing precious water.

I stood nearby watching and listening to the grease from the grease gun snapping and crackling at each fitting, the green gobs oozing out when the fitting was well greased. Hank went on to explain that the hydraulic line to the front bucket was going bad anyway and it might be unsafe for me to take a ride. After he'd had a chance to fix the line, he said, then we'd go ups and downs. How'd you get yourself all wet, I remember him asking, hurrying around, greasing the machine, anxious to finish up.

I was wet, too, head to toe, but I was drying out quick in the heat. That's what I was getting ready to tell Hank about, something important having to do with him going to Bitter Creek, and I also wanted to tell him to come over and have dinner with us. But suddenly Dad come flying up the dirt road that run between Hank's place and ours, the lights atop his sheriff's car flashing in a real frenzy.

While Dad was pulling me towards the car, telling me I was going to Aunt Meg's a little earlier than usual, I caught quick snatches of the conversation between him and Hank Byerly. Things like: a real butchering . . . over at the Johnston house . . . all we got are her fingertips.

Of course, as you know, Emma Lou Johnston liked to entertain as many men as she could—more than was good for her as it turned out.

Some say she did it to spite her husband, Earl Johnston, who had a mean streak in him that sometimes raged out of control worse than a river wild with spring runoff. Others said she just had an itch she could never satisfy, that Earl couldn't satisfy, and that's why she had half the men in the county taking their pleasure with her while Earl was out getting drunk, or working, whenever he felt like working.

You'd be surprised at whose name showed up on Dad's list of pleasureseekers. (I watched Sam King squirm uneasily in my kitchen chair.)

And when she got tired of a particular man, thought he might be getting a bit too possessive, she'd tell him to take a hike. If he refused, like Johnny Coats refused, maybe too much in foolish love with her, Emma Lou would call that guy's wife, like she did with Johnny Coats' wife. She told Mrs. Coats, "If you can't take care of

your man, there's other women besides me willing to do it. I don't need his hassle." Dad has it on record that Emma Lou said that to Mrs. Coats. Got it from Mrs. Coats herself just before Mrs. Coats divorced and left Johnny.

Right after Emma Lou was done with Coats, Rob Levinson took up with her, and that's how it was when Rob found the place in a bloody shambles.

So Dad had three good suspects right off in the killing: Earl Johnston, Johnny Coats, and Rob Levinson. Each had a motive, and if you stretched it, each had opportunity because none of their alibis was the best; each owned an axe. But then everyone in the county owned an axe. The police were able to determine from the splintered wood of Emma Lou's banister, where her fingers had been chopped off, that it was an axe that was the murder weapon. Dad figured she'd put her hand on the banister to pull herself up to try to get away from whoever was attacking her and he lopped her fingers off, like you'd chop a chicken wing in half on a cutting board by slamming it hard with a heavy meat cleaver. There was axe marks all through the house.

So, anyway, if you took those three suspects one at a time, it looked like this:

Earl Johnston became Dad's number one suspect. Johnston told the police he'd been drinking at the Holley Hotel in Bradford most of that day. The Holley (now called the Riddell House) is a big place with two bars and sits on Bradford's Main Street, so there's a lot of people coming and going, in and out. Most everyone there remembered Earl Johnston being there most of that day. But if you questioned them carefully, none of them could actually say Earl was there *all* the time. It would have been real easy, crowded as it was, for Earl to slip out unseen, go home, argue with his wife, and take after her with an axe. Or maybe he went home drunk and started roughing her up, and things got out of control. According to Dad, the fact that they found no body pointed to Earl. The way Dad figured, Earl might have wrapped the body in plastic, maybe in big plastic bags because she might have been in pieces, and buried her along with his bloody clothes, or hid them intending to come back later to clean up the mess. But Rob Levinson showed up before he could do that.

Keep in mind, too, she was killed in the morning hours, not too much before Rob showed up because the blood was still wet, pooled in places, and samples could be taken easily throughout the house.

Now, Rob Levinson, as you recall, was a young bachelor, living at that time in a small house up on Big Shanty Road. He was the one who placed the call to Dad. Dad probably wouldn't have put much suspicion on Rob except Rob lied to him. Rob told Dad that he never thought of Emma Lou as anything more than a pleasure machine and he figured since all them other men were getting something, why shouldn't he? After all, he was single, he said—one of the few single guys to ever take up with Emma Lou. She seemed to prefer them married probably because there was less chance of deeper involvement that way—and he liked being free, playing the field, Rob said. He sometimes needed a little something Emma Lou was willing to give him, but she was just another of his many girlfriends, he claimed.

After checking around, Dad found out Rob didn't have many girls out in his "field," was considered by most young women as kind of an odd duck, in fact. The women Rob's age said they actually went out of their way to avoid him because he was too possessive. Three women said that when they did date Rob, right off he started talking about them getting married. On the first date, mind you. Then Dad found out that the week before Emma Lou's butchering Rob had bought some lumber supplies to remodel his house and he told the salesman there that he was "fixing up his bedroom and bath" and that he was "getting nesting instincts and maybe it was time to change lifestyles, settle down a bit." Then he ordered some decorative bathroom sink tile with the initials *E. L. L.* built into the design. It seemed Rob Levinson was a little more serious about Emma Lou than he liked to admit.

Rob's alibi was that he'd gone down to Saint Mary's to shop. Although no one was with him and no one could actually verify this, Rob produced a couple of sales slips from stores. Problem was, those slips only gave the day, not a time or anything else informative, and none of the register girls actually remembered waiting on Rob. He could have picked the slips up anytime.

The way Dad had it figured, Rob might have gotten too serious with Emma Lou, and true to her ways, she told him to take a hike. It can really enrage a young man to be told something like that by someone like Emma Lou. Especially if you've gone and spent a lot of money fixing up your house, getting ready to nest up with a bird who ain't wanting to nest up with you.

The reason Johnny Coats was a prime suspect for Dad was, quite simply, that Johnny Coats told a barroom full of people at the

Westline Inn one day just prior to the incident that he could kill Emma Lou Johnston for that phone call she made to his wife. Not that their marriage was all that great anyway. Couldn't have been or else Johnny wouldn't have been sniffing around Emma Lou's in the first place and wouldn't have fallen in love with her, which was what made Emma Lou reach for the phone. And like the others, Johnny Coats' alibi was shaky. He said he was just driving around on the day in question.

I asked Dad one day, if Johnny *had* killed Emma Lou, wouldn't he have provided himself with a better alibi? Wouldn't any of them have? Dad told me not necessarily. Emma Lou's death was too brutal, he thought, to be planned out. Why not just shoot her? It wasn't likely, Dad explained, that someone said to himself, I think I'll go over and dismember Emma Lou for this reason or that. In Dad's mind, the butchering of Emma Lou was a crime where the killer was out of control, consumed by a violent passion, blinded by rage, fueled by lust. He probably doesn't even remember what went on while he was doing it, Dad speculated. And the brutality of it, according to Dad, seemed to preclude any notion that some other woman did it. Women got their own way of being brutal with each other but it has nothing to do with an axe, is how Dad put it.

All this led Dad to believe that that was why the body was taken. The killer suddenly snapped out of it, saw what he'd done, and needed to try and hide his deed. But there was just too much blood everywhere. So Dad came to believe that the murder was a local doing and not done by some drifter who happened along. Pent-up passion and vengeance were the motives, Dad was sure.

None of the three suspects had any blood on them, their clothes, their cars, or in their houses. The police looked everywhere for that body. There were more warrants issued from the courthouse over the next few months than marriage licenses. But they never found Emma Lou Johnston.

The police did find fingerprints. Some they matched; some they didn't. Earl Johnston's, of course, were all over the place. On the elongated drawer handle of the nightstand next to Emma Lou's bed, and on the night lamp, they found quite a few prints. Two they matched with Johnny Coats and Rob Levinson. But why not? It was in that nightstand that Emma Lou kept a healthy supply of condoms. Emma Lou always practiced safe sex.



But when all the dust settled, when the weeks turned to months, years, then decades, this was about all the police ever came up with: blood, three good suspects, some fingerprints, three fingertips. No body.

I moved towards the fridge to get Sam King and myself another soda. I still imagined Sam was lingering in the kitchen just to beat the heat; the story I'd just related was common town knowledge.

I could have gone on, I suppose, and told him how Dad had made his promise to Emma Lou's mother at the memorial service they held when they finally come to admit (though they didn't have their daughter's body) that Emma Lou was most likely dead. Dad promised that grieving woman he'd bring in the person who'd done it. He'd find her killer, bring him in, convict him, and fry him in Rockview. Emma Lou's mother was very grateful for this promise, and she was grieving hard because no matter what kind of person a daughter turns out to be, there's always a strong love line tying mother to daughter, daughter to mother, and in most cases to try to cut that bond between the two is like trying to cut a thick strand of rope with a butter knife. It takes a lot more than a little promiscuity to sever a mother's love for her daughter. Same type of bond exists between father and son, I guess. So she was grateful for Dad's doing what he could to solve it, to put to rest the lingering questions: who did it, and where was the body of her little girl?

I suppose I could have told Sam King how not unearthing anything else about that murder through the years just ate Dad up from the inside out. It wasn't for want of trying, either, that nothing more ever come of it. Long after the state police and everyone else had given up on the case, Dad still kept it fresh.

He ran down every lead he came across. He began compiling a massive note file and a long list of names, men who'd spent time with Emma Lou, questioning each man over and over; asking each if Emma Lou had ever said anything about feeling threatened, being threatened, anything, by anyone. Then he'd ask these men, many of whom were his good friends of long standing, if they could remember where they'd been at the time of the murder, but so much time had passed it was hard for anyone to verify any alibi. And while Dad was discreet with his inquiries, most the area men wished he'd just stop bringing it all up again, asking embarrassing questions that their wives might find out about.

And so, largely for that reason, Dad got voted out of office. He lost again the two more times he ran. Dad always blamed his

defeats in those elections on his relentless pursuit of the Johnston butcher:

I suppose I could have told Sam King all that, but I knew Sam's name was on that list and that he was one of the men voting Dad out. Besides, Sam knew all that anyway.

What he might not have known, and I told him, was that sometimes I'd find Dad standing on our front porch just staring out across the property, across Route 219, where in the fall when the leaves are dropped and there's plenty of gray spaces between the branches Dad was able to see the skeletal remains of the Johnston house. The house was all dilapidated, roof collapsing, each bone-white shutter on the two front windows hanging down on one nail. The front door had been kicked in by kids, and on some days when the light was just right and your mood was just right, the gaping hole where the door used to be could look like a woman's mouth caught open in a frozen scream.

A promise made is a debt unpaid, Dad would quote to me from a Robert Service poem, "The Cremation of Sam McGee," while staring at the house across the way. The quote was meant to explain his obsession with solving the thing. "I can't die owing," he'd add. When he told me that, I think it was about the time he was beginning his treatments.

But noble as his vow was, later on as the years passed and Dad's obsession grew inside him, dark and ugly like the cancer that eventually killed him, I had no choice but to wonder if maybe Dad himself hadn't visited Emma Lou once or twice. Maybe he too had fallen in love with her, and when he was promising Emma Lou's mother he'd find the killer, maybe he was actually making a promise to Emma Lou Johnston. And while I hated to think about it, it did explain a lot about his behavior. Love can carry a man a long ways. Wrong ways, too.

"So there you have it," I said to Sam King.

He lifted his head, looking astounded. "So there I have what? You haven't told me anything I didn't already know. Well, except for the part about your daddy maybe visiting Emma Lou. I never thought about that. That's—"

I watched his face cloud over.

"You're not going to try and tell me your daddy was the one who killed Em—"

"No."

"Then what are we digging in the corner of your property for? Tell me what you know." Sam was getting agitated and impatient, far beyond stomping on his hat. In fact, he was picking it up to leave, crumpling it in his hands.

So I told him. I told him sometimes a moment from the past comes back to you clearly, like when you hear a certain song you haven't heard in years and suddenly you realize not only do you remember all the words to that song, but you remember exactly what you were doing when that song was playing; what you were thinking and feeling, who you were with, and sometimes you can even recall things like different smells or the feel of something. It all comes back vividly. And that was how I explained it to Dad the day he died in the hospital: that I had an idea I'd been working on from distant memories that just seemed to spring to life in me one day, vivid and as crystal clear as a pool of water, memories singing to me like I'd just heard a song from the past. I told him that if I checked a few things out I could verify it easily and maybe, before he died, I could come up with who it was that killed Emma Lou Johnston.

As I was explaining to Dad what I suspected, looking out the Bradford hospital window, I could hear him scratching weakly on his notepad behind me. By this time the cancer had him by the throat and he couldn't talk, so he wrote notes. I told him who I thought killed Emma Lou, why, and what he'd done with the body. Should I follow up on it? I asked.

But when I turned to see his reaction, to see if he thought what I was saying was feasible, I saw he'd died right then and there and I saw where he'd written on his pad: yes.

And so I made him my promise. I promised him I'd follow it up, and then I covered his face properly and respectfully, that he could know more peace dead than he had living.

"And so that's why we're digging, Sam. As Dad said, a promise made is a debt unpaid. So let's go out and pay off that debt."

Sam rubbed his hands all over his face. "But you ain't told me yet who killed Emma Lou."

"Hank Byerly did."

"Hank Byerly?"

I had Sam King's full attention now.

We walked out towards Sam's backhoe, taking the dirt road running between my place and what used to be the Byerlys' place,

a narrow road overgrown with goldenrod, pig weeds, and burdock. I still wasn't sure whether Sam King was going out with me to load up his machine or to help me dig.

It was that dirt road that I figured Hank Byerly used when transporting Emma Lou's body for a quick burial. I figured he went that way because of the big dip in the field—he wouldn't be spotted by anyone. Ours was the nearest house, and back then no one was home at our place during most days; me off at Aunt Meg's, Dad working.

And while I'm sure he didn't plan it that way (like Dad said, nothing in the murder was planned), what better place to hide a body than right on the property belonging to the very man who'd be helping to investigate the crime? Last place Dad would expect to find that body was on his own property.

All Hank had to do was run down with his backhoe where, hidden from view, he could break sod with a shovel, dig a quick hole with his backhoe bucket, dump the body in it, cover it, and replace the sod. That freshly dug grave would be overgrown with weeds and field growth in no time.

"How'd you ever land on Hank Byerly as the one who'd done it?" Sam King asked as we neared his machine. The sun was slanting in from the west by now, and while it was still hot, it was cooler than before. We positioned ourselves so that the roof of the backhoe cab provided us a touch of shade.

"It was just one of those things," I told Sam. "After Dad and I talked one day, I got to remembering the day they discovered the murder, and like I told you, like a song from the past, that day came back clear as a whistle. Only now I was seeing the events of that day as an adult, not as a kid.

"Remember, the last time I saw Hank I was seven years old. I viewed the world then, like any seven-year-old sees it, with mirror-like blinders on. That's how kids see the world. They have a limited view of things, and most everything they see seems to be put there only for them. A kid feels he's the center of the universe, not just a small part of it. All I saw that day was Hank bringing his backhoe out of the barn and that I might get a ride in the front bucket."

"What else was there to see?" Sam asked. He leaned a hip against a tire.

"Well, for instance, look what you did when you shut your machine down," I told him. "You automatically set both front and back buckets on the ground. For safety reasons, wasn't it? Isn't

that what they teach heavy equipment operators to do? Lower all raised equipment?"

Sam was nodding his head. "It's SOP. Bulldozer operators do the same thing with their blades."

"That's right. All operators do. But Hank didn't. In fact, when he come out of the barn and saw me coming up his drive, he actually raised his front bucket to the point he nearly clipped the door. Then he kept that front bucket raised the whole time I was standing around. If that was you and you had some little kid hanging around your machine, and you shut down to grease it, wouldn't you automatically lower your buckets for safety—particularly if you had a bad hydraulic line, like Hank said he had that day? That line controls the bucket, keeps it up. I'm sure now he didn't have a bad line. He told me that so I wouldn't pester him no more about ups and downs."

I didn't have to look at Sam King to know he was still nodding, agreeing. I scanned the empty field and the fresh places in the ground Sam had dug up.

"So a good operator would lower his equipment unless there was something in the front bucket Hank didn't want me to see. Something like the body of Emma Lou Johnston."

I waited for a response from Sam, but all he did was grunt, watch me, and listen intently.

"Once I began to play with the idea of Hank Byerly possibly being the killer, things began to fit in. I reviewed the entire day, and continued looking at it as an adult would have seen it. For instance, Hank telling me he was getting ready to go to Goodnoes' up Bitter Creek. I know now he wasn't going there. Leastwise not to fix a water line. He just told me that so I'd leave. I figure he was just coming out of the barn with Emma Lou's body in the front bucket, getting ready to bury her, when I showed up to ask him over for dinner. Remember, Rita was gone."

"How can you say he didn't go to Goodnoes'?" Sam wanted to know.

"How? 'Cause I'd just come from Goodnoes' that morning. That was part of what I wanted to tell Hank just as Dad pulled in to fetch me. I wanted to tell Hank he didn't have to go up to Bitter Creek and fix their water line running from their spring. The Goodnoes had plenty of water. That's why I was all wet. I'd been playing with the Goodnoe twins. We'd been spraying each other off with the garden hose, filling the little plastic pool and then

jumping in with our clothes on to cool off. Wasn't any water in the creek to speak of. What I wanted to tell Hank, because I wanted nothing more than to ride in that bucket, was that the Goodnoes weren't on a spring any more. A few months before they had sunk a well, hit a good well, and had more water than anyone in the county, or so it seemed. They didn't even have their spring hooked up no more. They got tired of it going dry."

"But you still have to connect Hank Byerly with Emma Lou Johnston," Sam said.

"I've done that already. I did it last week. It's what I was asking Dad whether I should do, when he died. He answered the only way he could, by writing yes on his notepad."

"And—"

"I drove to Clearfield to talk with Rita Byerly's sister. Hank's funeral was held in Clearfield where, like Rita, he was from originally. And after the funeral Rita never came back. Today she is living out in Seattle, remarried. After collecting the insurance on Hank's life, she had their place here sold through an agency. So there's a very good chance Rita Byerly knew nothing about the murder of Emma Lou Johnston. She was probably too busy grieving her ownself. But she sure knew who Emma Lou was."

"Oh?" Sam raised an eyebrow.

"I asked Rita's sister if she could remember exactly why Rita had come to Clearfield that week. Was there a family reunion? Was it a standard visit? Why? Her sister had no problem at all remembering, was quite willing to tell me, in fact, since she never cared for Hank Byerly as a brother-in-law anyway. She said Rita had caught Hank fooling around with a young local woman and Rita come down to get away from Hank because she'd just told Hank she was fixing to divorce him but she wanted some time to herself to think it through."

"Did her sister mention Emma Lou as being that other woman?" Sam wanted to know.

"I asked the sister if she knew the name of that woman, and she said no. All Rita told her was she got a call and the caller said something like, if you can't take care of your man there's other women besides me willing to do it."

"Emma Lou Johnston," Sam said flatly, pushing his hat back.

"It sure sounds like Emma Lou. And Hank Byerly getting too involved with her. I figure Hank did to Emma Lou what Johnny Coats threatened to do for the same reason."

Sam King hopped onto his machine and turned the ignition on. "Hank Byerly," he said to himself out loud. "Well, I'll be damned." He angled a look towards me. "We better hurry," he said. "Only got a few more hours of light left. Where do you think I ought to dig next? Over there by that rock?"

We found Emma Lou's remains about ten feet off the dirt road, an easy reach for the back arm of Hank Byerly's backhoe extended way out. First we spotted a skeleton foot, then a thigh bone. Then we dug with pick and shovel until we had the entire remains unearthed.

The Pennsylvania state police came, marked the scene, and carted the remains away to the Erie lab for positive I.D. They have to be official about these things. But I didn't need any official proclamation to know it was Emma Lou Johnston buried in that field alongside what was left of a double-edged axe and some rotted farmer's coveralls. All I had to do was look at the bones of the left hand where three fingertips had been chopped off.

There's been talk in the area that I ought to run for sheriff, as kind of a commemoration to Dad. I doubt if I'll run, though. But it's funny, most of the men talking about my running are those who voted Dad out. I guess they may be feeling a little guilty about doing what they did, and maybe feeling a whole lot relieved now that everything concerning Emma Lou's murder has been put to rest finally.

Put to rest.

Emma Lou's been put to rest. Dad and his promise have been put to rest. Even I feel unburdened these days, like I'd just paid off Dad's thirty year house mortgage.

No. Dad's twenty-two-year-old promise has been paid off.

And now, whenever I drive by the Johnston house, I can't help notice that it no longer leaps out at me like the ghostly skull of a woman screaming. It's just a house I see. Just a house.

That's how much at rest I am.



# THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGRAPH

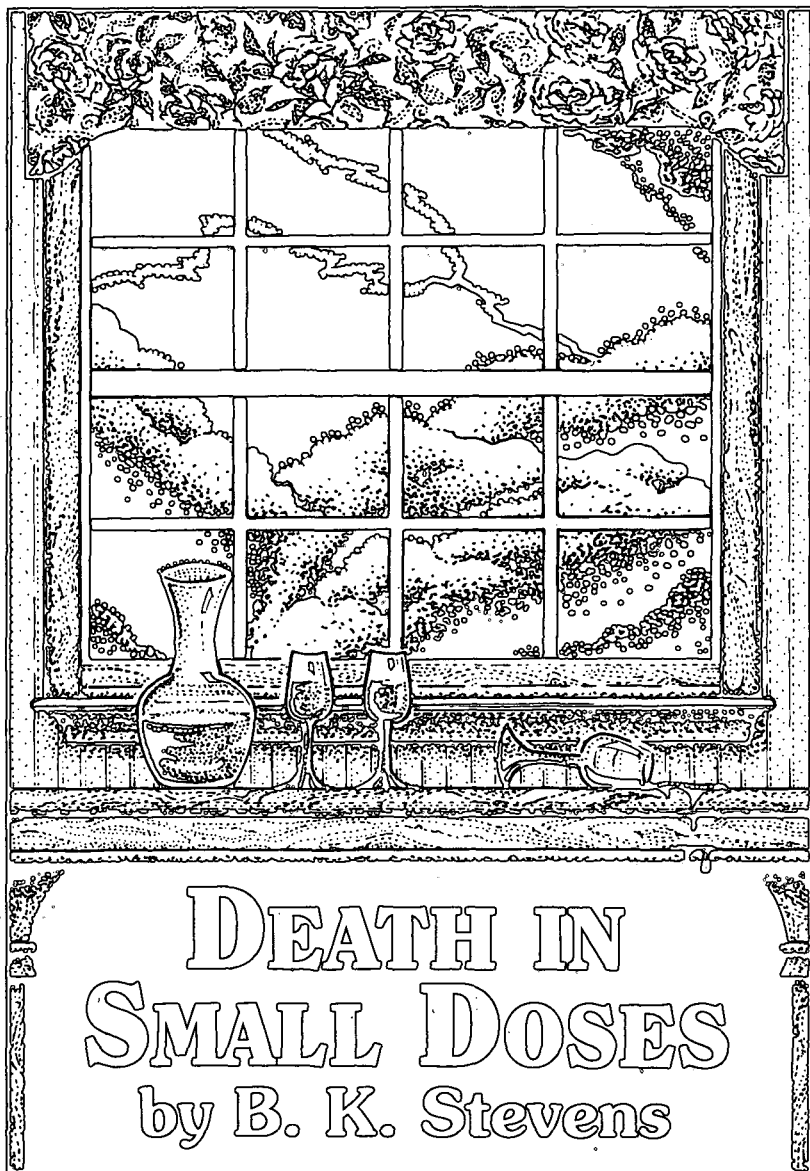


*Henri Silberman, N.Y.C.*

Doggone. (Dog going?) We will give a prize of \$25 to the person who invents the best mystery story (in 250 words or less, and be sure to include a crime), based on the above photograph. The story will be printed in a future issue. Reply to Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, 1540 Broadway, New York, New York 10036. Please label your entry "December Contest," and be sure your name and address are written on the story you submit.

The winning entry for the July Mysterious Photograph contest will be found on page 157.

FICTION



# DEATH IN SMALL DOSES

by B. K. Stevens

*Illustration by Laurie Davis*

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“You may say what you will for chemistry and sociology,” Neville Carter said, his mouth puckering with mild delight as he waited for his own punchline. He was tall and mostly grey, round at the middle and soft everywhere else. His eyes couldn’t quite work up a glister, but they did sputter a bit. “You may say what you will,” he continued, “for history and biology. You may praise the virtues of philosophy and sing the praises of music. I, however, shall always maintain the supremacy of English. Why, without English we couldn’t even talk to each other.”

People actually laughed. Not me, of course, and not Miss Woodhouse or her mother or the stern, compact woman sitting at the far end of the table. But everyone else erupted with determined glee.

“Good one, Nev,” called out a middle-aged woman. “‘Couldn’t even talk to each other’! That’s telling them!”

“‘Sing the praises of music,’” echoed an equally middle-aged man. “That’s—well, clever. It’s very—well. And so on.”

“And ‘the virtues of philosophy,’” a young but faded woman put in anxiously. “That was clever, too.”

“Very bold,” a young man said, prolonging a chuckle. “Insightful, articulate, and very bold.”

It was like a scene from a nightmare. Thunder crashing outside, a gloomy dining hall lined with disapproving portraits, six English teachers, and me. I cast a resentful glance at Miss Woodhouse, who sat across the table from me, her face rigid and unreadable. Why was I here? Yes, I knew this was her old prep school, I knew the woman becoming the new chairperson of the English department tonight was both Miss Woodhouse’s former teacher and her mother’s longtime friend, I knew Matilda Arnold had badgered both Woodhouses until they’d felt obliged to come. But I had no connection to either the school or Dr. Arnold, and Miss Woodhouse knows I hate speeches and feel insecure about my grammar. Just once, couldn’t she drag someone else along to be the buffer between her and her mother?

Neville Carter emerged from his self-satisfied giggles and got ready to speak again. Didn’t the man have any decency? He’d dozed comfortably through the first four after-dinner speeches, blinking himself into vaguely-smiling consciousness only when the trib-

utes his colleagues were giving him moved them to applause. Now *I* needed sleep, and I couldn't get it until he shut up.

He glanced at his notes. "These have been good years," he said. "While it has been my honor to serve as your chair, the department had prospered. We have protected the curriculum against the envy of other departments, actually increasing the number of required English courses. We have labored to ensure we are not unjustly slighted when budgets are set, leaves granted, salaries determined. So I hope you will not accuse me of arrogance if I say I look back at these years with 'modest pride.' Like Milton's Eve, you know—'modest pride.'"

The four teachers sitting nearest him hummed and nodded, impressed. Professor Woodhouse nudged me in the ribs. "Milton," she whispered, "was talking about sex. A ghastly, inappropriate allusion, little Harriet."

"And now," Neville Carter went on, "I look forward to my retirement. I hope you agree I've earned the rest—"

"Hear, hear!" the middle-aged woman cried, unable to contain herself. "Well-earned! Well-earned!"

Neville Carter flushed with pleasure. "I shall miss you all.

But it's good to know I leave you in capable hands." He lifted his eyes from his notes, looking down the table at the so-far-silent woman who stared back expressionlessly. "Matilda, you have been absent from our midst too long. I remember when you first joined the English department, many years ago. I remember how sorry we were to lose you when the headmaster asked you to become dean. And although you've had your little disagreements with us over the years, I speak for everyone when I say how happy we are to have you back. I know you will be a fine leader, a firm, loyal advocate for the department and its interests. I know your tenure as chair will be accomplished and harmonious. I trust it will be as deeply satisfying as my own. Welcome, Dr. Matilda Arnold. Welcome back to our department."

There was applause, of course—I applauded wildly, too, so relieved and happy he'd sat down at last. Two white-suited waiters began setting small glasses by each place. Miss Woodhouse had told me about this part of the tradition. Drinking isn't usually allowed at faculty functions at Newton Academy, but when a department changes hands, the incoming chair is allowed to pro-

pose one toast in honor of the retiring chair. And so now one waiter circulated with a cut-glass decanter, pouring careful inches of sherry. The other waiter took a second decanter and filled Dr. Arnold's glass. That's right, I remembered. Miss Woodhouse had told me she had a heart condition and couldn't drink at all—that must be juice. Poor woman. Sitting through all those speeches and not getting even one decent belt as a reward.

Dr. Matilda Arnold stood up. She looked about sixty and was thin and short, but there was nothing frail about her. She was sturdy and energetic and intensely intelligent—you could see all that at a glance. And she was mad. You could see that, too.

"Thank you for that speech of welcome, Neville," she said, each word slow and distinct. "I doubt, however, that everyone in this department shares your professed enthusiasm about my return. One of you is trying to kill me."

Finally, action. I sat up straighter, looking to Miss Woodhouse for confirmation. But she saw me looking and shook her head. The announcement had taken her by surprise, too.

It had certainly surprised everyone else. There was a mo-

ment of absolute quiet, then a nervous giggle from the young woman. Neville Carter frowned. "You're joking, of course."

"I am not joking," Matilda Arnold said sternly, then shrugged. "I may be exaggerating. The attempts on my life have been so clumsy and stupid it's hard to believe they were sincere. Of course, since a member of this department was behind them—well. They *may* have been sincere. At any rate, someone's trying to scare me away. In the month since the headmaster announced I'd be the new chair, I've received two anonymous threats through campus mail, each followed by an attack. The second threat arrived yesterday morning, and late last night someone got into my house and extinguished the pilot light in my oven. My cat woke me before there was any danger—indeed, it would take the house so long to fill with fumes that I probably would have arisen in time even had Boots not been so vigilant—but the attempt *was* made. And today I received another threat."

She took a sheet of paper from her purse and handed it to Miss Woodhouse. "Here, Iphigenia. Now you know why I insisted you come tonight. I've followed your career with inter-

est. I know about your accomplishments as a police officer and a private detective. Accordingly, this morning I mailed you the other two threats and some additional documents. With luck, you'll receive them tomorrow and can begin your investigation immediately."

Miss Woodhouse shook her head. "I appreciate your confidence, but if you're right, you'll need bodyguards around the clock. We can't really—"

"I have also," Matilda Arnold cut in, "given a check to the Friends of the Seagull Society—a strange little charity, of no interest to me, but a favorite, I know, of your mother's. The check has been cashed. You are thus, I think, honor bound to consider your retainer already paid, yourself already hired."

Miss Woodhouse looked ready to protest, but her mother silenced her with a snarl. "Raise no objections, you nasty girl. Matilda needs your help, and you quite frankly need the business. Must you fuss every time someone hires you?"

That settled it. "I'm sorry, Mother," Miss Woodhouse said meekly. "Dr. Arnold, I'll be happy to take your case, but this isn't the time to discuss it. Perhaps tomorrow—"

"Oh, what nonsense," Neville Carter cut in. "Matilda, we can-

not have private detectives meddling in our affairs and creating scandal. If someone *has* been playing pranks on you, it's undoubtedly a student, and the Dean of Students will handle it. I cannot *believe* you'd even suggest that a member of this department could wish to harm or threaten you."

"The threats are all on department stationery," Matilda Arnold countered, "and I'm sure Iphigenia will find they were typed on the department's computer, to which you all have access. Further, the threats are literary, and I hardly think students would express their hostility with line references to Shakespeare or Tennyson. And despite your saccharine speech, I know none of you wanted me as chair. You, Neville, haunted the headmaster's office for three solid weeks after he announced his decision, whining and protesting and threatening lawsuits."

Neville Carter bristled. "I made no explicit references to lawsuits. I merely pointed out that, while I bear you no animosity, departments usually select their own chairs. It is unusual and somewhat insulting for the headmaster to ignore their vote and insist on his own choice."

"It is *very* insulting," Matilda Arnold agreed, "but the head-



master hardly ignored your vote. He saw the name of the person you elected and became physically ill." She looked up at the middle-aged man. "Jeffrey Littel—Neville Carter's listless clone. The predictable successor to your legacy, Neville, the first person you hired when you seized control of the department twenty years ago and set about filling it with weaklings you could control, with people so relentlessly mediocre they would make even you look good by comparison."

Jeffrey Littel flushed. "I—well. I resent that."

She raised an eyebrow. "You recognized it as an insult, then? Good. A flicker of intelligence. Cultivate that spark, Jeffrey, if you hope to teach anything but ninth grade grammar for the rest of your life. I probably can't get you dismissed, but tenure won't protect you from dreary teaching assignments. I know how lazy and incompetent you are, how you recycle lectures for decades and won't allow students to ask questions because you haven't a clue about how to answer them."

"That's his teaching style," the middle-aged woman said angrily. "You have no right to criticize it."

"Ah yes," Matilda Arnold said, smiling. "Valerie Littel, devoted sister of Jeffrey—not

quite as stupid and inert as he, but twice as scheming, twice as vicious. You used your brother to wheedle your way into a position for which you are not even remotely qualified, and ever since you've neglected your students and concentrated all your efforts on school politics, made so frantic by your guilty knowledge of your incompetence that you couldn't rest secure even after you bullied the school into granting you tenure. You thought you'd be the power behind the throne, didn't you, when Jeffrey was named chair? Think again, Valerie. As of now, you've lost your influence. For one thing, I'll have the final say on hiring. No longer will you be allowed to fill the department with creatures like Adam Pulen."

The young man at the table shook his head sadly. "You're just revealing your own bitterness, Matilda."

"Yes, I'm bitter," Matilda Arnold said. "Bitter at seeing a man like you teaching at this fine old academy, at seeing your corruption tolerated and allowed to spread. You are even more worthless than the other untenured person in the department, than Carla Perry, who caters to every student whim, who shows movies in class three times a week so she needn't bother to prepare and



her students needn't bother to open a book—"

"But my students don't *like* books," Carla Perry said peevishly. "They'd *rather* watch movies. And I'm so busy with student committees and organizations, with Delta Phi Phi and the Student Affairs Committee and the Sunshine Squad—"

"That's right," Matilda Arnold said, nodding. "Use that as your excuse—and be sure to mention all the memorable projects you've sponsored, such as last year's Self-Esteem Carnival. You can list them on your *vita* when you apply for your next job. By the way, Iphigenia, I've sent you the *curriculum vitae* of all the members of the department. Study them closely, to familiarize yourself with the backgrounds of these mediocrities. We'll meet soon. And now," she said, lifting her glass, "the traditional toast. Neville, you drove me from teaching two decades ago, by making this department so abominable I could no longer stand to be part of it. Now I return, and as you and all your cronies know, I do so with the single intention of purging the department before I too retire. The person behind these ridiculous threats shall be the first to go, but none of you will be allowed to neglect your duties

any longer, to nap through your classes and devote all your time to scheming for selfish, petty advantages. And so, beloved colleagues, I drink to you."

She drained her glass, frowned, and set it down. "Shockingly bitter apple juice," she observed and clutched her throat, and gasped, and crashed forward over the table, dead.

**A**t nine the next morning, I sat in the spacious, sunny parlor that serves as the office for Woodhouse Investigations, typing the final report for an insurance case. Miss Woodhouse walked in briskly—six feet tall, broad-shouldered, lean, her black-grey frizz of hair pulled back tightly and fastened with a thick blue rubber band. She cast a deferential glance at her mother, who sat in a rocking chair framed by the big bay window. Today, the professor was whittling potatoes into the profiles of presidents, completing a model of Mount Rushmore.

"Harriet," Miss Woodhouse said, "I'll be busy in the kitchen for the next two hours. I have, of course, informed the police about the materials Dr. Arnold sent me. An officer will come by for them at eleven."

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I frowned at her. "But the mail always arrives by ten."

She frowned back. "I know that. I told the police that. And Lieutenant Glass—and the police said someone would come by at eleven. When the mail arrives, you must open it as usual, and make copies of anything important. You must not by mistake open the envelope from Dr. Arnold—it is, after all, evidence in a possible homicide—and you must not copy anything to which only the police should have access at this point."

God, I hate it when she pulls these stunts. I knew what was going on. Lieutenant Glass had been her fiancé fourteen years ago, before the professor had had her breakdown, before Miss Woodhouse had felt obliged to break off her engagement, resign from the police force, and start a private detective agency so she could devote more time to her mother. And I knew that Lieutenant Glass was still in love with Miss Woodhouse, and that she was too proud to accept the help he was frantic to give her, and that they had come up with all sorts of dodges to disguise the fact they were cooperating. And always, when they staged one of their charades, I was cast as the stooge.

I sighed. "All right, Miss Woodhouse. When the mail comes, I'll be careful not to open the envelope from Dr. Arnold. And I won't make copies of any documents we shouldn't have."

The professor sniffed loudly. "Clumsy," she said, defining Teddy Roosevelt's mustache with short, sure swipes of her knife. The charade was partly for her sake—she knew that—and if she wanted it to continue, she'd have to play almost as dumb as me. "I am morally certain, Iphigenia, that Matilda did not die of natural causes. She was poisoned. You must prove that."

"I'll try, Mother," she said, and hid in the kitchen.

The mail came promptly at ten. I whistled obliviously, keeping my face stupidly limp as I opened each envelope and made copies of everything—the electric bill, a subscription offer from *National Geographic*, everything Matilda Arnold had sent us. Promptly at eleven a uniformed policeman arrived, and Miss Woodhouse emerged from the kitchen, smelling of ammonia.

"Here you are, officer," she said. "The envelope from Dr. Matilda Arnold, containing—good God, Harriet! You didn't accidentally open it, did you?"

I shrugged. "I guess," I said. "Silly me."

The policeman blushed. He was very young, very embarrassed. "Lieutenant Glass asked me to give you this," he said. "It's a letter, I think, thanking you for your cooperation."

She slit open the envelope. One sheet of stiff police stationery and a few typed lines—and stuck to the back of it, with maple syrup, a sheet from a yellow scratch pad. "What's this?" she said, feigning surprise. "Let's see—'Death from massive overdose of digitalis. Victim's digitalis prescription refilled one week ago, five pills unaccountably missing from bottle in her medicine cabinet. Possibly stolen during burglary at her house, night before her murder. Find the burglar, find the murderer.' Goodness, officer. I don't think I was supposed to see this. You'd better return it to Lieutenant Glass."

The officer took the yellow sheet from her awkwardly. "The lieutenant also said to ask if you'd like a key to Dr. Arnold's house, since your mother's an old friend of hers and since Dr. Arnold has a cat—he thought you might want to feed the cat. And he asked me to say he looked the house over this morning but didn't touch anything, won't take anything

away until tomorrow. So he said maybe you'd like to feed the cat tonight."

Somberly, Miss Woodhouse took the key from him. "I shall," she said, "feed Dr. Arnold's cat tonight. Thank you."

He left, looking glad to escape. "I hope, Harriet," Miss Woodhouse said severely, "you were not so very careless as to accidentally copy the contents of Dr. Arnold's envelope."

I tried to look confused. "Gosh. Maybe. At least, I *think* these are copies of the things she sent you. What do *you* think?"

I handed her the copies, and she took them to her desk. "Well, these *could* be copies of the threats she received—they're similar to the ones she gave me last night, which I of course turned over to the police. What do you think, Mother? 'T. Wolfe, 1940'—does that sound like a threat?"

The professor didn't look up. "A reference to a Thomas Wolfe novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*. Yes, in the context of Matilda's return to her department, that might be a threat."

"And this note was attached to it," I said, handing Miss Woodhouse the copy. "Received Monday morning, April 19. That evening, as I worked in library, bust of Sir Isaac Newton toppled from its stand

in upper balcony, crashing inches from my feet. Library nearly deserted—no culprit in sight.”

“Interesting,” Miss Woodhouse said. “And here’s the next one. *Richard II*, III, ii, 103—should I look it up?”

The professor glared at her. “Do you doubt me, Iphigenia? Let’s see—ah, yes. Most likely, ‘The worst is death, and death will have his day.’ A more specific, more serious threat.”

“Yes, they do seem to be escalating,” Miss Woodhouse agreed. “What does Dr. Arnold say about that one, Harriet?”

I read from the photocopy. “Received second threat May 10. That night, sat up until one, making notes for talk with I. W. At four, Boots woke me. Pilot light out, gas fumes. No break-in, but faculty secretary keeps key in her desk, for feeding Boots when I’m out of town. Easy for any faculty member to take.”

“Just as it would have been easy for any faculty member to slip into the dining hall last night while we were having punch in the lobby,” Miss Woodhouse said, “and poison the decanter of apple juice—from which, of course, only Dr. Arnold would be drinking. I’m sure her heart condition was common knowledge. And then there’s the final threat, the one

Dr. Arnold showed me last night. I’ve looked it up already—it refers to Tennyson’s ‘Charge of the Light Brigade,’ the lines about riding ‘Into the jaws of death/Into the mouth of hell.’ Any thoughts, Mother?”

“Just that this person shows a slight preference for British authors—but that, of course, could have been done intentionally, to mislead us. What else did Matilda send, Harriet?”

I looked through the copies. “A brief cover letter, saying she hopes to talk to Miss Woodhouse soon. Aside from that, just the resumes of the English teachers, with some penciled notes on them. I’m surprised she didn’t send more—aren’t you?”

“Oh, Matilda would be discreet about what she’d commit to writing,” the professor said. “She wouldn’t send an outsider, even a detective, written records of confidential information she’d learned in her capacity as dean. The *vitae*, however—and they are called *vitae*; dear Harriet, not resumes—are essentially public documents. There’s no impropriety in showing them to us—and little chance they’ll reveal much. People seldom put damaging information about themselves on their *vitae*. To uncover *that*, we must persuade

the department members to inform on each other."

"They won't," I said, shaking my head. "They're so close, so fond of each other—they couldn't say enough good things about each other last night. I bet they'll all refuse to talk to us, put up a really solid front."

The professor smiled. "Don't be too sure, little Harriet. Judging from my years in academia, I'd venture—"

The doorbell rang. Neville Carter was standing on the front porch, wearing a black suit, looking somber.

"I've been to the funeral home," he said when I let him into the office, "to check on the arrangements. Poor Matilda has no family, you know. She devoted her entire life to the Academy."

"It's very sad," Miss Woodhouse agreed, and waited.

"Indeed." Neville Carter took the chair near her desk. "And I thought I should stop by here. I spoke to the police last night, but it *does* seem a private detective—well, we must guard the Academy's reputation, and since you're a loyal alumna, I'm sure you'll be more discreet. Can I help you in any way?"

"I hope so," Miss Woodhouse said, and shot a knowing glance at her mother. The professor, grinning, had gone back

to her potato-sculpting, straightening the lines in Lincoln's beard. "Now, Mr. Carter, do you know anything about the attempts on Dr. Arnold's life? No? Then do you know if anyone in the department had a special grudge against her, a special reason to fear her?"

He seemed to think it over. "Not really. Certainly *I* had no reason to fear her—I'm retiring, you know, and so would be quite beyond her reach. Jeffrey and Valerie Littel are tenured, so they're safe, too. And they're such fine people, such dear old friends—it's absurd to imagine either would harm her. As for Carla Perry, her tenure decision *is* coming up next year, but she's done so well here that I'm sure it's just a formality. No, none of us had any reason to fear Matilda."

"You haven't," Miss Woodhouse said, "mentioned Adam Pulen."

He fidgeted with his tie. "Didn't I? Well, he's a true scholar, completing his dissertation at a first-rate university. True, he *did*—but I'm sure he wouldn't *murder* anyone."

Miss Woodhouse picked up Adam Pulen's *vita*. "I notice he graduated from college in 1984 and began graduate school in 1989. That leaves several years unaccounted for. See? Dr. Ar-

nold circled those dates, and wrote 'gap' in the margin."

"So she did," he said, peering. "Well. This is awkward. I *do* know what he was doing during those years—but I didn't, you understand, when we hired him. I found out just this fall, when a woman wrote to Matilda, trying to track him down. Some tale of a broken engagement and an illegitimate child. The young woman's name was Rebecca Carswell. You may have heard of her father, the Reverend Edward Carswell?"

"The one who ran that television ministry?" Miss Woodhouse asked. "The one who's now serving twenty years for fraud?"

He nodded. "Yes. Adam worked for the Reverend Carswell for several years, and was named in the indictment after the *60 Minutes* piece and all the disclosures. But Adam was never convicted, you understand—never convicted. He wanted to start over, and that, apparently, entailed breaking his engagement to Miss Carswell, who claimed Adam had fathered her child. But the tests were inconclusive—you see—inconclusive. When we learned all this, we were naturally dismayed. Still, he was so young when it happened—early twenties—and we all make errors in judgment, so

who are we to condemn others? The department voted to keep Adam on. But Matilda wanted him dismissed. She was quite frustrated when the headmaster sided with us."

"And I see from these notes," Miss Woodhouse said, "that Dr. Arnold also had doubts about his teaching, and his critical approach. Do you share those reservations?"

Neville Carter shrugged. "Oh, well. His approach—I couldn't say what it is, really. I haven't much interest in such matters, or much time to supervise teaching. Other duties keep me too busy—I have to protect the department's interests, you know. I'm sure his teaching and approach are fine."

"But Dr. Arnold *did* care deeply about such matters," Miss Woodhouse said. "If she'd become the new chair, she would presumably have again tried to get rid of Mr. Pulen."

"Perhaps." He shifted in his chair. "Although I wouldn't conclude he'd therefore—no. I won't point an accusing finger at anyone. Still, if one *did* feel compelled to search for someone with a motive, and if one *did* feel his youthful indiscretions indicate a lack of character—but I'm sure not."

"Thank you for your candor, Mr. Carter," Miss Woodhouse



said solemnly, standing up. "I know this was painful for you."

As soon as he was gone, I threw my hands in the air. "His own colleague! And Carter served him up to us on a platter."

"Well, he was almost bound to serve *someone* up to us," Miss Woodhouse said. "I'm sure he wants this case concluded quickly, before police and detectives poke around in his department too much and uncover any little secrets *he's* hiding. And Adam Pulen was the natural choice as sacrificial victim. He's been in the department only two years—his arrest would be embarrassing, but not as bad as the arrest of one of Carter's longtime cronies. And Carter—Harriet, will you see who's at the door?"

This time it was Carla Perry. She was barely thirty but already looked about half used up, her movements small and nervous, her face drawn into a permanently resentful expression. She looked me over and sniffed, unimpressed.

"I want to talk to someone important," she said.

She didn't much like having Professor Woodhouse in the office, too, but the professor didn't budge. The professor never budes. Anyone who wants to talk to Miss Woodhouse had better get used to that. Carla

Perry fussed briefly and gave up.

"I wanted to see if I could help," she said. "With your investigation, I mean. If you need information or anything."

"We do," Miss Woodhouse said. "For example, is there anyone with a special reason to resent Dr. Arnold?"

Carla Perry laughed harshly. "You mean *besides* Jeffrey?"

Even Miss Woodhouse seemed surprised the accusation had come so quickly. "I assume you mean Jeffrey Littel?"

"Well, I don't know of any *other* Jeffrey I could mean, do you?" The sarcasm seemed automatic and unconscious. "Yes, I mean Jeffrey Littel. I'm not saying he killed her, but obviously he had the most reason to resent her. He was sure he'd be the new chair, and then the headmaster names Dr. Arnold. It was a real slap in the face. Jeffrey was livid that day, and he said some things—but I wouldn't want to repeat them."

"Then you shouldn't have alluded to them, little girl," the professor commented, rocking steadily in her corner. "Now, I suppose, you want us to tease you out of your feigned reluctance. Let us deny her the pleasure, Iphigenia. Let us ask instead about the tenure decision facing her next year."

Carla Perry flushed. "That's no big deal. I mean, it's all sewn up. I mean, I've got a Ph.D., which is more than *some* people in the department can say, and I've done lots of extra stuff with the student clubs and committees and things."

"Dr. Arnold didn't seem impressed with your efforts," Miss Woodhouse said, looking over Carla Perry's *vita*. "She's bracketed your list of the projects you sponsored and written 'excessive, detrimental' in the margin."

"Well, she didn't care for Assertiveness Awareness Week," Carla Perry admitted, "and she had reservations when we put the Inter-Active Video Arcade in the library. But students love things like that, and students come first, right? It's just that Dr. Arnold was old fashioned and put all this emphasis on teaching, like we can expect students to *study* all day. So we disagreed, but we never, like, argued. She respected my philosophy."

"Which you describe so eloquently," the professor observed. "We shall give all your comments due weight." As soon as Carla Perry was gone, the professor shuddered. "And some university awarded a Ph.D. to *that*. I tremble for the academy, Iphigenia."

"As do we all," Miss Woodhouse agreed. "And yet Carla Perry's natural stupidity is probably no greater than Neville Carter's. It's just that she went through the schools thirty years later, and thus received no education. Well, I suppose that visit was predictable. Perry's an obvious suspect, since she's coming up for tenure and Dr. Arnold couldn't stand her—naturally, she'd want to point us toward someone else."

"Do you think she picked Jeffrey Littel at random?" I asked.

"Possibly. Or perhaps she honestly *does* suspect him, or perhaps she hopes to get him out of the way and become chair herself." She picked up Valerie Littel's *vita*. "His sister's the only other possible candidate, and all she's got is a B.A.—Perry's degree makes her a likelier choice."

"I guess," I said, "but even so—"

The phone rang. It was Valerie Littel, whispering, asking if I could slip away for lunch. I repeated the question, looking at Miss Woodhouse for a decision. She nodded, and I accepted.

I went to Chic and Ruth's, a justly popular deli in Annapolis's historic district, and spotted Valerie Littel in a corner booth. Or rather, I sniffed her

out—even the rich fragrance of pastrami couldn't keep me from zeroing in on her perfume. I'm not a squeamish person. Secondhand smoke doesn't faze me, I visited L.A. for a week and never noticed the smog, I drive by chemical factories and fields of grazing cows without rolling up my window. But last night, sitting next to Valerie Littel at dinner, I'd nearly passed out from the perfume.

Today she was wearing sunglasses, and a scarf covered her too-curled, too-teased, implausibly black hair. "I'm glad you came," she whispered. "I feel awful about this—I don't know if I should come forward or not. I want you to advise me."

"I'll try," I said, "but if you have some information, why don't you tell Miss Woodhouse and—"

"No, no. I'm not ready to take that step." She bit her lip. "He was my teacher, after all, and my friend."

God. What next? "You mean Neville Carter?"

"Yes," she said miserably, and took a thick bite of her egg salad sandwich. "He *did* hire me, after all—even though he's held me back all these years, and not given me the teaching schedules and committee assignments I deserve—so I suppose I owe him something. But

murder! That's very serious, isn't it?"

I solemnly agreed that murder was very serious. "You think Mr. Carter murdered Dr. Arnold?"

She nodded, still munching. "Neville hated Matilda, and he hated having a woman take over the chair—that's why he backed Jeffrey and not me, even though I've done a *lot* more for the department. Well, that's how men are. The headmaster's sexist, too. He didn't want me as chair, either."

"He picked Dr. Arnold," I pointed out. "She's a woman."

"A woman he could control. I liked Matilda very much, but she was a traditionalist. The headmaster wouldn't want to stir things up by giving a woman like *me* any power."

This was awkward. "Or maybe he picked Dr. Arnold because she had a Ph.D. I saw your *vita*, and—"

Her head jerked up, and I felt the anger burning through the sunglasses. "It wasn't about degrees. It was about power. The headmaster wanted to rule through Matilda, and Neville wanted to rule through Jeffrey. It'd kill Neville to give up control, even after he retires. He shaped the department in his own image and ran it for decades. If Matilda had taken over, all that would have

changed. That's why he had to kill her."

At least she was blunter than the others had been. "Do you know of any proof?" I asked.

She hesitated. "Not exactly. But before dinner, when we were all having punch in the lobby, I went to the ladies' room to freshen my perfume, and I saw a man sneak into the dining room. I didn't see him clearly—I was at the far end of the hall, I never went *near* the room myself—but I *think* it was Neville."

All through the rest of her egg salad sandwich and my turkey club, I tried to get her to say something more definite. No luck. She told many tales of Neville Carter's tyranny and mental instability but wouldn't get more specific about the person she'd seen last night. Well, I thought as I walked back to the office, possibly she hadn't seen anybody. Possibly, she was just afraid someone had seen *her* leave the lobby, and wanted to get her own accusation on record before someone hurled one at her.

When I got back to the office, Adam Pulen was already seated in the chintz armchair near Miss Woodhouse's desk. He was by far the most stylish-looking member of the department—blond hair slicked straight back like a male mod-

el, three-piece grey suit with a vaguely continental look, designer tie with Windsor knot. I wouldn't have called him handsome, though. There was an evasiveness about his features that had made me rule him out immediately the night before, even without making my usual wedding ring check.

"I'm glad you're back, Ms. Russo," he said, standing up as I entered. Well, he got points for remembering my name. "I was just telling Ms. Woodhouse and her mother about the rumors flying around campus today. They can't be true, can they?"

"I'm afraid so," Miss Woodhouse said. "Dr. Arnold died of a massive digitalis overdose. She was murdered."

He frowned slightly, as if reluctant to contradict her. "Well, that's one way to read it, I suppose. But it could just as easily have been an accident—or suicide."

"Certainly not!" the professor cried indignantly. "I have known Matilda Arnold for decades, young man, and she was not such a fool as to accidentally drop five digitalis pills into her apple juice. And she would never take her life intentionally."

He shrugged. "Intentionally, unintentionally—it's impossible to know, isn't it? Look at it

this way. She'd committed herself to being the chair, and I'm sure she wanted to shake things up, but at her age she must have dreaded the thought of a daily struggle with colleagues who didn't want her back. So she sends herself threatening letters, fakes murder attempts—there were no witnesses, were there?—and poisons her juice. She gives a grand speech, telling us all off, and dies. Now she's a martyr, and everyone in the department is a murder suspect. She's succeeded in shaking things up, but spared herself the slow drudgery of reform. Who's to say that's not the way to read it?"

The professor glared. "I say it. I knew my friend, and what you suggest is impossible. You seem eager to spread this theory of yours, young man. You couldn't be trying to create a distraction, could you, to divert attention from incriminating evidence about yourself—some youthful indiscretion, perhaps?"

He nodded in gracious acknowledgement. "So you already know about that. But that's the point—everybody already knows. I have nothing left to hide, and I had nothing to fear from Matilda Arnold. She'd have no reason to drag out old secrets and risk creat-

ing a scandal for the Academy, when everybody knows I'll be leaving Newton after one more year anyway."

"You will?" Miss Woodhouse said. "Why?"

"Because my dissertation is nearly complete. Once I have my Ph.D., I'll move to university teaching. I have no desire to stay at Newton forever, teaching nothing but literature and writing. My real interest is critical theory. Check with my graduate professors—they'll tell you I'm doing very well on my dissertation and have excellent prospects for finding a position. While you're at it, check Matilda's appointment calendar. You'll find I went to see her after she was named chair, to make sure we agreed about letting sleeping dogs lie. She assured me that she had no interest in the past, that she was far more concerned about certain things going on at Newton right now."

"Certain things?" the professor echoed. "Clarify, please."

He went through the same little fake-hesitation act the others had performed. "Well, I'm not accusing anyone of murder, but Matilda *did* mention Carla Perry—Carla's—well, to be frank, she's been sleeping with students. She loves all those little committee projects of hers, and I guess

that's one way of getting students to cooperate. And Matilda *did* say she planned to bring all this up at Carla's tenure hearing, and she'd already warned Carla about it. Of course, even if that might *look* like a motive, I'm not saying Carla's the one."

"Of course you're not," Miss Woodhouse said, nodding. "I understand perfectly. And I—Harriet, would you get the door?"

Naturally, I had to get the door again. There was still one loyal member of the English department left, and he had to spread his bit of dirt, too. It was awkward, though—ushering Jeffrey Littel into the office even before Adam Pulen left.

Adam Pulen sprang to his feet. "Jeffrey! What a surprise!"

Jeffrey Littel frowned. "Yes. Well. I was just coming to tell the Woodhouses about visiting hours at the funeral home."

"And I was just leaving," Adam Pulen said, and fled.

"Please, sit down, Dr. Littel," Miss Woodhouse said. "You wanted to tell us about visiting hours?"

"Well, yes—that is, yes." Jeffrey Littel lowered himself into the armchair. He was absolutely the dullest human being I had ever met. His face was pushed-in and pasty, his hair was scant and limp, his voice

never aspired to anything beyond a drone. "That is—well. Visiting hours are from four to six tomorrow, and we're all going around five, then going to my house—mine and Valerie's—for sherry, and cheese, and—well, and so on. And—well, since your mother was a friend of Matilda's, and—well. Perhaps you'd like to come. And so on."

The speech took five minutes. My eyelids were already drooping. "Thank you," Miss Woodhouse said. "We'll come."

"Good. That's very—well, good." He paused for a solid two minutes, and I nearly dozed off. "And I—well, I hate to say this, but—well, duty, and such, and the law, and—well. And so on. So I thought I should come forward."

Even Miss Woodhouse was yawning. "About what, Dr. Littel?"

"Well, about—well, about Valerie, you know. My sister? Well. I love her, of course, but I—well. I thought you should know. She and Matilda—well. Valerie always wanted to be chair herself, but without a suitable degree—well. The headmaster would never—well. And to see another woman, one she despised—well. And so on. Not that I'd want to—of course not. But she's been staying out late for no rea-

son, and being secretive, and—well. I thought you should know. And so on.”

Professor Woodhouse let out a loud hiss, and her daughter snapped into awareness. “Yes. Thank you. And we’ll be at visiting hours tomorrow. Harriet, please see Dr. Littell out.”

I stumbled across the office and nudged him through the door. I was rubbing my eyes as I went back to join the Woodhouses. “His own sister!” I said. “I don’t believe it.”

“Believe it,” Miss Woodhouse said grimly. “I’d guess she’s been bullying him all his life, and he’s sick of it and wants his freedom—even weaklings *do* want freedom, you know, even if they wouldn’t know what to do with it. Well, we now have some leads. Our next step is to feed Dr. Arnold’s cat. But since Barry—since Lieutenant Glass said to feed it tonight, I’ll wait until after dark. It could be the police would find it awkward if we showed up while it’s still light. So I’ll—”

“You will not go to Matilda’s house at all,” the professor said severely. “You know how frightfully allergic to cats you are, Iphigenia, and I am *not* about to nurse you through another attack. We will send little Harriet.”

Miss Woodhouse balked. “But she’s a secretary. I’m

sorry, Harriet—you know I have great respect for you, but you’re not trained as a detective. You won’t know what to notice.”

“Then she must notice everything,” the professor said firmly. “You shall not go to that house, Iphigenia. Give dear Harriet what instructions you will, but you shall not go.”

And that’s why, at ten that night, I drove to Dr. Matilda Arnold’s house alone, armed with a Polaroid camera, a legal pad, detailed instructions, and a sack of Meow Mix. I was determined to notice everything.

Boots was curled up just inside the front door. I scratched him behind the ears and reveled in his purr. “Oh, you’re a fat, fine cat,” I said, “and I’d love to take you home, but I can’t have a pet in my apartment. Don’t worry, though. We’ll find *just* the right home for you. I hope you like Meow Mix.”

I filled his bowl and changed his water, then got to work. Dr. Arnold’s desk first—the professor had warned me it’d be messy, and she hadn’t exaggerated. Apparently, Dr. Arnold never cleared off her desk, just let things accumulate in layers. The top layer featured an open copy of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and a yellow pad with the heading “Notes for Meeting



with I. W." I copied down the block-letter jottings on each page—notations about Neville Carter's flagrant incompetence and indifference to teaching, Jeffrey Littel's numbing laziness, Valerie Littel's viciousness and politicking, Carla Perry's committee projects, Adam Pulen's unsound theories and spotted past. I took a picture of the desk, then moved to the dining room and took a picture of the stereo topped by an album cover for a recording of *Tosca*.

And then there was a noise upstairs. My hands tensed so sharply that I snapped another picture without meaning to. It's the killer, I thought. The killer came back here for some reason, and heard my car pull into the driveway, and didn't have time to get out of the house, and ran upstairs to hide. And now the killer's waiting for the right moment to sneak up on me with a gun, or a knife, or a syringe of digitalis, or something.

Oh, nonsense. Don't be a fool, Harriet, I told myself sternly. It's just the cat. And I am *not* going to act like the thriller heroine who slowly inches her way up the staircase, only to scream stupidly when the harmless cat leaps at her.

All the same, I had to see what that noise was. Slowly, I

inched my way up the staircase. The noise had come from the left, I thought, so I turned that way and stepped cautiously into the first room I came to. I switched on the light, the harmless cat leapt at me, and I screamed stupidly.

"Oh, you silly Boots," I said, and took a moment to glance around the room. This must have been Dr. Arnold's bedroom, I thought, noting the narrow bed with its Spartan white spread, the well-stocked bookshelves, the clutter-free bureau, the fiercely polished hardwood floor and old fashioned braided throw rugs. Just the sort of bedroom you'd expect her to have.

I reached for Boots, but he slipped away, heading purposefully for a closed door in the room and rubbing his back against it, purring reproachfully. "Is that her closet?" I asked, smiling. "Is that where she keeps your catnip? Your toys? Is that the problem? Well, we can take care of that."

I walked over to the closet, pausing before the heavy oak door to bend over and scoop Boots up. I heard a click and looked up—just in time to be hit full in the face by the door as it was shoved open suddenly. I don't really remember falling backwards, but I do remember hitting my head on that gleam-

ing floor—I don't think I'll ever forget that—and then I must have blacked out for a few seconds. I woke up to darkness, to Boots licking my face and meowing in disapproval, and to the sound of footsteps pounding down the stairs.

"Rats!" I cried, and got to my feet. Desperately, I stumbled through the darkness, slipping on a braided throw rug, colliding with the bookcase, finally tripping over Boots and falling against the wall and finding my hand on the light switch. I turned it on, the room sprang into view again, I flung open the door and ran down the stairs. But the intruder was gone.

"Oh, rats again!" I cried, then apologized to Boots, who seemed offended by that particular curse. Mumbling an assortment of other curses, I spent the next hour moving from room to room, taking pictures and filling my pad with notes.

It was midnight when I got to Woodhouse Investigations. Miss Woodhouse was waiting in the kitchen, smoking Marlboros and drinking Diet Coke—two vices she can indulge in only when her mother isn't around. She listened silently to my description of what had happened as she leafed through the Polaroids.

"Any sign of a break-in?" she asked, fingering the picture of the stereo.

"Not that I could see. And the doors were locked."

"Then we have to wonder how the intruder got in. It wasn't the key in the faculty secretary's desk this time—I'm sure the police took that." She paused to gaze at the notes about Dr. Arnold's desk. "Well, if it's the same person who got in the other night and blew out the pilot light, he or she may have had a copy made—an incautious, arrogant thing to do. We also have to wonder *why* this person risked going to the house again."

"To remove incriminating evidence?" I suggested.

She nodded, barely listening. "Possibly. Not necessarily. Harriet, you've had a long day and done well. Get some rest."

As I left, she was reaching for the telephone. I know who she's calling, I thought. Well, he'll be glad to hear from her, even at this hour. And she must have noticed something really important in those notes and pictures, if she's willing to put aside her pride and ask him for help directly.

**W**hen I returned in the morning, she was in a fine mood. "It's a beautiful

day, Harriet," she observed. "And that's a beautiful dress you're wearing. But you'll have to change it later—it's not dreary enough for a funeral home."

Oh, good. I'd been hoping she'd ask me along for that. "Do we keep working on the Arnold case today?" I asked.

"Oh, no need," she said cheerily, flipping through her address book. "We can concentrate on locating a suitable home for Boots. By the way, Mother, I know you'd like to come to the visiting hours, but perhaps it would be safer for you to stay home. Things may reach something of a climax at that point."

The professor looked up from the papier-maché duck she was making and scowled. "I shall certainly honor my old friend by attending the visiting hours. And your professed concern for my safety doesn't deceive me, you nasty girl. You've engineered something, haven't you? Will That Man be there?"

Miss Woodhouse looked abashed. "Not if you object, Mother."

"I most definitely object." She slapped a bill on the duck, so hard she nearly crushed its face. "If you are too inept and lazy to handle the situation on your own, have someone else sent. The city *does* employ

more than one police officer, does it not?"

That put a damper on the morning, but a reasonable level of harmony had resurfaced by the time we set out for the funeral home. Miss Woodhouse looked crisply mournful in a tailored black suit, my navy blue dress was undisgraceful, and the professor was magnificent—a long black silk dress, high-buttoned black shoes, black lace gloves, black shawl, black hat with face-covering black veil. No doubt about where she was headed.

The members of the English department stood in a knot in the reception room, competing to produce the loudest sigh and the longest face. Neville Carter pointed sadly toward a side room.

"Poor Matilda's in there," he said.

The three of us walked in slowly, the professor in the middle as we stood by Matilda Arnold's casket.

"Dear Matilda," the professor sighed. "Not the very nicest person, true—a hasty temper, an inclination to vindictiveness—but a woman of integrity, and a fine teacher. I am glad you had the opportunity to be her student, Iphigenia. Since taking her classes, you have not, I believe, ever once dangled a modifier."

"I don't believe I have, Mother," Miss Woodhouse agreed. "She was fierce about modifiers—no student dared dangle one in her presence. I feared her then, but thank her now."

The professor sobbed softly—the first time I ever heard such a sound come from her. There was an impatient cough behind us, and I turned around to see Carla Perry standing in the doorway, her arms folded across her chest, her face sullen.

"We're leaving for the Littels' house," she said. "Neville told me I should tell you. If you're going to come, come now."

"In a moment," Miss Woodhouse said, not turning around, and we lingered by the casket. Don't worry about Boots, Dr. Arnold, I thought, looking down at her. We found him a good home.

As we drove to the Littels' house, Miss Woodhouse explained her plan, giving us careful instructions. By the time we arrived, all the members of the English department were gathered in the tiny living room. Neville Carter aimed himself straight at Miss Woodhouse and hung on her arm, trailing after her whenever she tried to turn away, droning on sonorously and endlessly about

his grief, his respect for Dr. Arnold, his eagerness to help bring her killer to justice. Carla Perry sat hunched in a corner of the sofa, taking resentful sips of her sherry and looking like she wished it was something stronger. Professor Woodhouse sat down next to her, undeterred by her scowls, and eventually succeeded in drawing her into a grumpy, halting conversation. I spotted Adam Pulen standing off by himself and walked over to join him. Since I was still teary after seeing Dr. Arnold, he offered me a tissue, patted my shoulder, and made sympathetic mumbles. Time to be nice, I decided, and asked him a random question about his dissertation. That set him off. He talked nonstop, gesturing eagerly, his face glowing with animation. I nodded in vigorous agreement with everything he said, letting my eyes grow wide with admiration, pretending I understood.

As for our hosts, Jeffrey Littel was in fine spirits. His usually ashen complexion had brightened so much that you could almost call it beige, and his walk—well, I won't go so far as to say there was a bounce to it, but his feet scarcely dragged at all. Quite a contrast to the way he had looked just yesterday. He passed from guest to

guest with a decanter, urging everyone to have more sherry, trying to make lively small talk and sometimes averaging as many as three syllables a minute. His sister, however, didn't really seem to be in the mood for entertaining. Valerie Littel's face grew grimmer by the second as she circulated among her guests, shoving cheese trays at us, yanking empty glasses from our hands, barking at her brother to be quicker with the refills. Once, I caught her glaring at me. I shot her my brightest smile and was rewarded with a snarl.

Finally, Neville Carter released Miss Woodhouse's arm, picked up his glass, and cleared his throat.

"We meet," he said, "on a sad occasion. Let me propose a toast to the memory of our revered colleague, Matilda Arnold."

We all took mournful sips. "And now," Neville Carter said, "we must look to the future. As you know, Jeffrey, I spoke to the headmaster, and he agreed to appoint you department chair. Even in these regrettable circumstances, we congratulate you."

So that's why Jeffrey Littel was looking so happy today. He blinked and smiled, smiled and blinked, bobbing his head jerk-

ily to signify his readiness for leadership.

Carla Perry, by contrast, looked ready to implode with envy. "But what about the murder?" she demanded. "We can't move on till that's settled. Have the police discovered anything?" She turned to Miss Woodhouse. "Have you?"

"Oh, I don't—well," Jeffrey Littel cut in, turning pale. "What I mean to say is—well. Not the time or place, and so on. The funeral home, and poor Matilda, and—well. And so on."

Valerie Littel drained her glass. "I say we get things out in the open. Everybody seems to think one of us killed Matilda. If that's true, I don't see how we can talk about the future. If there's a villain in our midst, I want to know about it."

Adam Pulen shook his head regretfully. "Can we ever *really* know, Valerie? Can we ever be sure it was murder at all, and not suicide or an accident? And even if it *was* murder, who's to say who the villain is, who the victim is? If Matilda drove someone to murder, doesn't she share the responsibility for—"

"Quiet, silly man," the professor cut in angrily. "This is not some text for you to deconstruct; this is a real woman, whose life was taken from her. Matilda was murdered—*she* is

the victim. Someone murdered her—that person is the villain. Have I made those points sufficiently clear?”

Adam Pulen shrugged, and half smiled, and looked away. Miss Woodhouse took over. “In fact,” she said, “both the police and I *have* made some discoveries. And although in some ways this *is* an inappropriate time to discuss such matters, a police sergeant will arrive here soon, and perhaps I should prepare you.”

“A police—here?” Jeffrey Littel said numbly. “But I don’t—well, that is—I don’t—”

“Stop sputtering, Jeffrey,” Valerie Littel said, and turned to Miss Woodhouse. “Is he coming to make an arrest?”

Miss Woodhouse raised a noncommittal eyebrow. “Perhaps. She—it *is* she, by the way—will try to locate one final piece of evidence, and an arrest may follow. Both the police and I believe the person who entered Dr. Arnold’s house the night before she died is the murderer. We have made a tentative identification of that person, and may soon confirm it.”

“But who *is* it?” Carla Perry demanded impatiently.

“Not until the police arrive,” Miss Woodhouse said, and made them wait. Ten minutes later, the police car pulled up. Miss Woodhouse greeted Ser-

geant Judith Hoffer and her partner, conferred with them for several minutes, then introduced them.

“Sergeant Hoffer has brought with her several photographs of Dr. Arnold’s house,” she said. “Some Ms. Russo took last night, and some the police took yesterday morning. Although Dr. Arnold’s house was not the scene of the murder, it *was* the scene of an alleged burglary, and Lieutenant Glass—and the officer in charge took full precautions. It’s fortunate he did.” She spread four pictures on a coffee table. “Here are two shots of Dr. Arnold’s desk and two of her stereo. You’ll see they’re almost identical, with two differences—in the pictures taken last night, an open copy of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* appears on the desk, and an album cover for the opera *Tosca* appears on the stereo. Neither appears in the pictures taken yesterday morning. Ms. Russo did not place those items on the desk and the stereo, and neither did the police. We must assume they were placed there by the intruder who was in the house last night, who knocked Ms. Russo out with a closet door and then escaped. Now, what do *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and *Tosca* have in common?”

Professor Woodhouse sniffed disdainfully. "Sentimentality," she said. "Mediocrity."

Miss Woodhouse smiled. "Perhaps. But aside from that, in both works the protagonists end their troubles by committing suicide. It seems to me our intruder put those items on display to suggest that Dr. Arnold was thinking of ending her troubles in the same way."

Adam Pulen could recognize a direct attack. "That's ridiculous," he said. "Would I have talked about suicide openly if I intended to plant false evidence suggesting the same thing? That wouldn't be very subtle, would it?"

Miss Woodhouse shrugged. "I don't accuse you of subtlety, Mr. Pulen—only of murder, and of arrogance. I don't think there's any limit to your arrogance. Everything about this case points clearly to murder, but you reentered the house to force conflicting evidence into the scene to confuse us, to make us think suicide might be a possibility, too."

"It is a possibility," he insisted. "Everything's a possibility. At any rate, I had no motive to murder her. She couldn't have hurt me. I'm leaving Newton next year anyway."

"Yes," she agreed, "to seek a university position. And to secure such a position, you'll need

a recommendation from the chair of Newton's English department. With Dr. Arnold out of the way, the chair was bound to be Jeffrey Littel—and I think you had good reason to believe you'd get a stellar recommendation from him. If Dr. Arnold were chair, you'd get no recommendation. She'd have gone out of her way to call any university to which you applied with details about your past, and to kill any chances of a position—an intolerable prospect for an ambitious young person. I think *that's* what she said when you had your appointment with her. I don't think she said one word about Dr. Perry's alleged sexual misconduct with students."

"What!" Carla Perry cried, stricken.

Adam Pulen turned to her, still not blushing. "I'm sorry, Carla. It looked like a motive, so I felt obliged to inform Miss Woodhouse. Matilda told me about your affairs with students, and she said she'd bring them up at your tenure review."

"Impossible," Professor Woodhouse said firmly. "Matilda would never share confidential information with a junior member of the faculty—it would violate all her standards of propriety. And if she suspected Dr. Perry of sleeping with stu-



dents, she would not wait until her tenure review. She would insist on immediate dismissal. Academies such as Newton cannot tolerate such misconduct for a minute, let alone a full year."

"But it isn't true!" Carla Perry wailed. "I haven't slept with any students. I would never—"

Miss Woodhouse held up a hand. "I believe you, Dr. Perry. I'm sure your sexual conduct is completely beyond reproach. We must wonder, then, how Mr. Pulen got the idea that you'd been having affairs with the students, that this was a weapon he could use to deflect suspicion from himself. There is, of course, his own record of abusing sexual relationships for his own advantage—the deserted daughter of the Reverend Carswell comes to mind, and there's at least one other woman he may have used to advance his career. He may have naturally assumed you, too, were unscrupulous about your relationships. But there is something more." She held up a sheet of paper. "This is a copy of a page from a pad on Dr. Arnold's desk, a page a curious intruder might have read when he entered her house to blow out her pilot light. It says, 'CARLA PERRY—STUDENT AFFAIRS. EXCESSIVE, DETRIMENTAL.'"

"But that didn't mean I was having affairs with students," Carla Perry protested. "I'm sure she just meant she didn't like my work on the Student Affairs Committee, and—oh." She looked with wonder at Adam Pulen, suddenly understanding.

"That's right," Miss Woodhouse said. "You misread what Dr. Arnold had written, Mr. Pulen. You were in her house the night before she was murdered, you saw her notes, and you misread them. Her remarks at the dinner, along with her penciled comments on Dr. Perry's *vita*, reveal her true intentions. You misinterpreted them, and that led you to falsely accuse Dr. Perry."

"To accuse—well!" Jeffrey Littel cried. "I mean to say—that is, a colleague, a member of this—well! Bad form, Adam! I mean to say, loyalty, and decency, and—well! And so on!"

"Very articulate, as always," Professor Woodhouse observed. "But in this one respect, Mr. Pulen is not unique. Each of you came to us yesterday with damaging information about a colleague. Each of you took turns as both accuser and accused. Think of *that* at your next department tea."

"True enough, Mother," Miss Woodhouse agreed. "In other respects, however, Mr. Pulen is

uniquely despicable. He saw a chance to benefit by murdering another human being, and there was nothing to hold him back—no moral standards, no belief that moral standards of any sort are desirable or real. He tormented Matilda Arnold for a month, and then he killed her.”

Adam Pulen looked at her coolly. “Prove it,” he said.

“All right.” Miss Woodhouse looked to Sergeant Hoffer.

Sergeant Hoffer stepped forward. “I’d like to see your key ring, please, Mr. Pulen.”

He hesitated, shrugged, and handed it over. “This doesn’t prove anything,” he said.

She looked through the keys, found an especially shiny one, and compared it to a key from her pocket. “Identical,” she announced. “Mr. Pulen, I’m reading you your rights.”

“Bastard!” Valerie Littell cried out suddenly. “Murderer! I loved you, you said you loved me, and I lied for you. I saw you sneaking out of the dining room that night, and I lied to protect you and said it was Neville. And the next thing I know, you’re flirting with some stupid little secretary!”

“You said it was *me*?” Neville Carter cried.

Miss Woodhouse nodded, satisfied. “A final confirmation—I wasn’t positive, but I was hop-

ing. Thank you for that deft little job of seduction, Harriet. I know it was distasteful to you, but you prompted Ms. Littell to respond in exactly the way I thought she would. Mr. Pulen, you’re finished.”

He looked back at her. Even the handcuffs didn’t seem to frighten him or shame him. “Don’t be sure of that. And don’t you act so self-righteous. You want to destroy me, don’t you? What you’re doing is essentially the same as what you say I did.”

Miss Woodhouse smiled grimly. “No, Mr. Pulen,” she said. “There is a difference. There is most definitely a difference.”

That wasn’t quite the end of the story. Adam Pulen pled not guilty, of course, concocting a story about why Dr. Arnold gave him a key to her house, why she’d confided only in him about Carla Perry’s student affairs. He reconciled with his deserted fiancée, Rebecca Carswell, and she and Valerie Littell took out loans to pay his bail. Then he disappeared, leaving both women dazed and in debt. Months later, California police picked him up in the coffee house of a university where he’d been using a false name, playing up to graduate professors, regaling them with stories

about how the records of his degrees at a European university had been destroyed in a fire. He's been brought back to Annapolis for trial. This time, there will be no bail.

On the evening of his capture, the Woodhouses and I celebrated with a bottle of champagne and a chicken stuffed with olives and onions. "He *could* still get out of it," I said, pulling off a drumstick. "He *could* fool a jury. He's so good at twisting things around. He comes up with these stories and you know they're outrageous, but it's impossible to prove it."

"It is quite possible to prove, little Harriet," Professor Woodhouse said serenely. "Not easy, but possible. Cling to common sense, and never fear to call absurdity and evil by their true names, no matter how cleverly and confidently they may present themselves. That is, I feel sure, what the members of the

jury will do. They are bound to be less sophisticated than the English faculty at Newton, and therefore less likely to tolerate nonsense. They will see through Mr. Pulen and his stories. Have no fear, little Harriet. They will convict him."

Miss Woodhouse smiled slightly. "And so Adam Pulen will at last become," she said, "a man of conviction."

For some reason, that struck me as terribly funny, and I started to laugh; but the professor frowned. "Do not feed her delusions, little Harriet. Iphigenia has no sense of humor. She has never once in her life made a tolerable pun."

"It wasn't *that* bad, Mother," Miss Woodhouse protested. "I've heard worse."

The professor shrugged, unconvinced, and Miss Woodhouse chuckled. We toasted Matilda Arnold's memory, and finished the chicken.

# UNSOLVED

by  
*Robert Kesling*

*Unsolved at present, that is, but can you work it out?*

*The answer will appear in the Mid-December issue.*

Aboard the cruise ship *Samoa Sea*, six couples found one another enjoyable company even though they came from different states and the husbands followed different professions.

Their merriment turned to deep anxiety when a typhoon struck with unbelievable power and ferocity. Gigantic waves tossed and tipped the *Samoa Sea* this way and that, slopping water over the slippery deck. There followed a popping of rivets, and water began flooding the engine room, then rising into the staterooms. At last the captain gave the dreaded call, "Abandon ship!"

The six couples, including one from Utah, scurried onto the dangerously listing deck of the stricken vessel. As their lifeboat was lowered, one of the group remarked, in an effort to relieve the tension, "Well, at least we'll have a dentist in our little company."

While their lifeboat bobbed and yawed, they consulted their map. "Near as I can figure," drawled the man from Texas, looking at the compass, "the nearest land lies over thataway."

"Illi Isle," remarked one of the women, looking at the map.

- (1) Adam, Bert, and Carl grabbed the oars on the port side, and their wives—Mrs. Mundy, Karen, and the woman from Wisconsin—took up those on the starboard side. The editor sat at the helm, trying to steady the rudder. No one was laughing.
- (2) At last the typhoon passed, and they saw land ahead. Everyone shouted with joy. Those at the oars put forth an extra burst of energy as they approached. The auditor, banker, and contractor (who included Earl, Julia's husband, and the man from South Carolina) leaped into the shallow water. Mr. Potts tossed them a line, and their leaking lifeboat was drawn ashore.
- (3) Dan, the banker, and the man from South Carolina pored over the map. "Look," said Dan, "Fiji lies only about a hundred miles from here. We can navigate that far."

"Yeah," agreed the banker, "with a lot of luck."

- (4) "We'll need some shelter," declared the practical florist, whereupon Greta, Ilene, and Laura volunteered to take their husbands—Fred, Mr. North, and the man from Tennessee—to gather driftwood and palm fronds.
- (5) Bert and Mr. Rampy later gathered wild fruits and berries.
- (6) After that, Fred, Greta's husband, and Mr. Orson found fishing gear in the lifeboat's emergency kit. They began casting from shore and soon landed enough fish for supper.
- (7) "Food is fine," said the contractor, "but we can't survive long without fresh water."

"Right you are," agreed Dan. "If Laura's husband and the man from Virginia will join me, we'll explore this tiny island before sundown. It must have a stream somewhere."

The three—Mr. North, Mr. Orson, and Mr. Queen—set off together. An hour later they returned, reporting success.

- (8) As they sat around the driftwood fire that evening, Mr. Rampy spoke: "We're surviving rather well; but I for one would like to get back to civilization."

Adam responded, "The auditor, Helen's husband, and I have already made plans to repair the lifeboat. I'm sure we three can start the job, and you men from Virginia, Wisconsin, and Texas can pitch in later."

- (9) Repairs were completed the following day, amid great celebration. The six couples made plans to set out the very next morning. Everyone retired in high spirits. Most slept soundly. At sunrise the florist and the editor went down to the beach to make final preparations. *The lifeboat was gone!*

They ran to tell the others. Dan and his wife, Helen and her husband, and the couple from Tennessee were aghast at this unpleasant turn of events. Then they discovered that one couple was also missing.

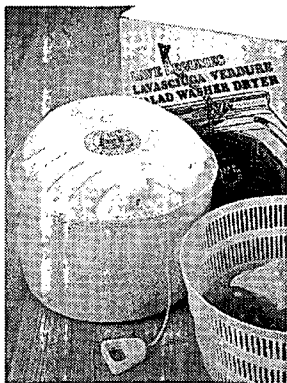
"Never did trust that man," growled the florist.

"So, here we are," wailed Helen, tears welling up in her eyes, "stranded on Illi Isle."

A happy ending? Of course—and a moral lesson, too! Their bonfire was spotted by a passing merchant freighter, and the five couples were rescued. Of the craven couple who took the lifeboat, nothing was ever heard again.

*Who stranded their companions on Illi Isle?*

# MAIL ★ ORDER ★ MALL

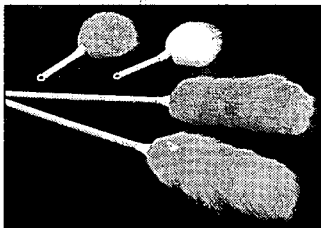


## ▼ SPIN WASH, SPIN DRY

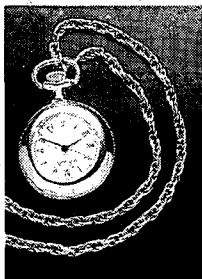
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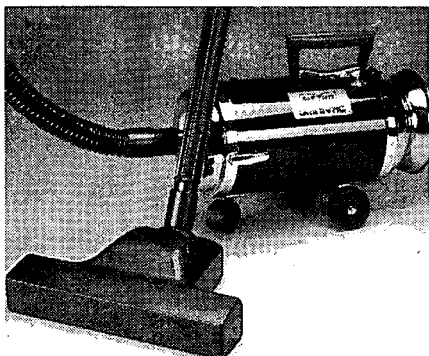
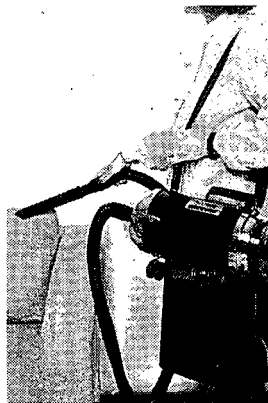
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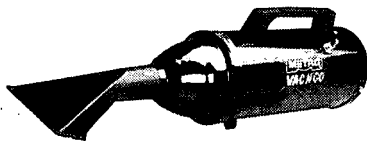
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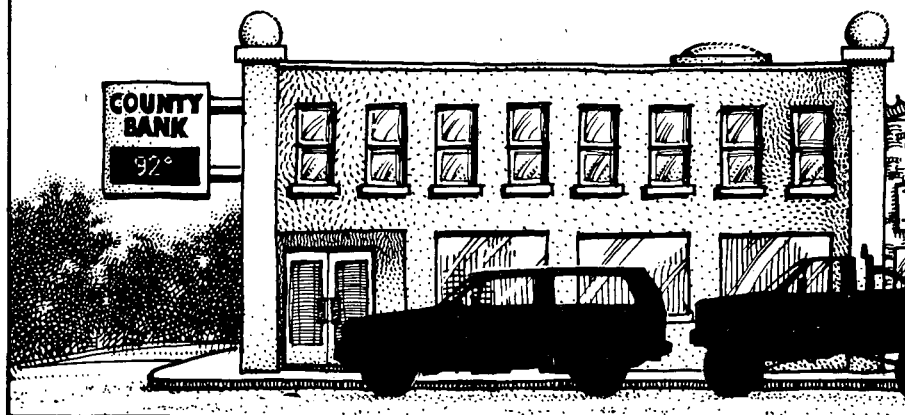
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# Report on



**S**uspects Tom Condon, 22, Eli Morton, 20, and Adlai King, 19, entered the County Bank at 11:45 A.M. Condon was armed with an Uzi, Morton and King with revolvers. Suspects are residents of Atlanta and drove here from there.

Upon entering, Condon fired shots into the ceiling and announced that they had come to rob the bank. The bank had 14 employees and eight customers present. One of the customers, Ann Williams, 28, screamed and ran toward the rear door. Morton shot her twice in the back. Pete Wansell, 33, another customer, ran toward her and was fired at by Morton, but Morton missed. Condon ordered Wansell back toward the counter. He and the other customers and employees were then ordered to lie on the floor.

Suspect robbers ordered the cash drawers emptied and took money from the vault. Altogether, James Paison, the bank president, estimated that they took \$80,000. It took them about ten minutes to complete the robbery. During that time two more customers, Randy Gertner, 58, and Lucinda Glassheart, 38, entered the bank. They were ordered to lie down on the floor with the other customers.

When they had completed the robbery, Condon told one of the

# the Robbery

by David Braly



customers, Sandra MacKinnon, 24, that they would take her as a hostage until they got outside the town limits. She began to cry and beg. Condon threatened to shoot her if she didn't comply.

Wansell then said that if they would take him instead of her, he would promise not to try to escape or make other trouble. Condon refused. MacKinnon continued to resist, however, and Wansell continued to offer to go along without trouble. Finally the suspects agreed to take Wansell as the hostage. Hearing this, Wansell whispered something to the man lying next to him, Dick Kerr, 71. The whispering upset the three suspects, especially Morton, who screamed at Wansell and threatened to "blow your stinking brains all over the building." Wansell said that he'd only asked Kerr to tell Wansell's wife that he, Wansell, loved her, in case he did not return. For some reason, this struck Morton as funny, and he laughed about it all the way out of the bank.

Paison called us as soon as the four men left. When we arrived, Kerr informed us that Wansell had told him to tell us not to be intimidated by his being held hostage because he had terminal cancer and less than three months to live, and those three months in great pain.

Naturally, this information did not prompt us to be any less careful in trying to apprehend the suspects. However, when we did finally stop them on the Honeytree Road, a gunfight broke out immediately. The three suspects and Mr. Wansell were all killed, and Deputy Harry Fry was wounded through the left lung. The bodies of the suspects and Mr. Wansell have been placed in the Tylerburg Funeral Home awaiting relatives to claim them.

Dr. Felt examined the bodies and also informed us that Wansell did not have cancer or any other terminal condition. He said that he had been Wansell's doctor since the day Wansell was born and had given him a complete physical checkup only two weeks earlier. We have no idea why Wansell lied to Kerr or why he was anxious (as it now appears he was) that we should shoot down the suspects, even at the cost of his own life. Kerr insists that what he told us is exactly what Wansell told him. We are certain that Wansell lied to the suspects about a final message for his wife because we have discovered from Dr. Felt and others that Wansell was a bachelor.

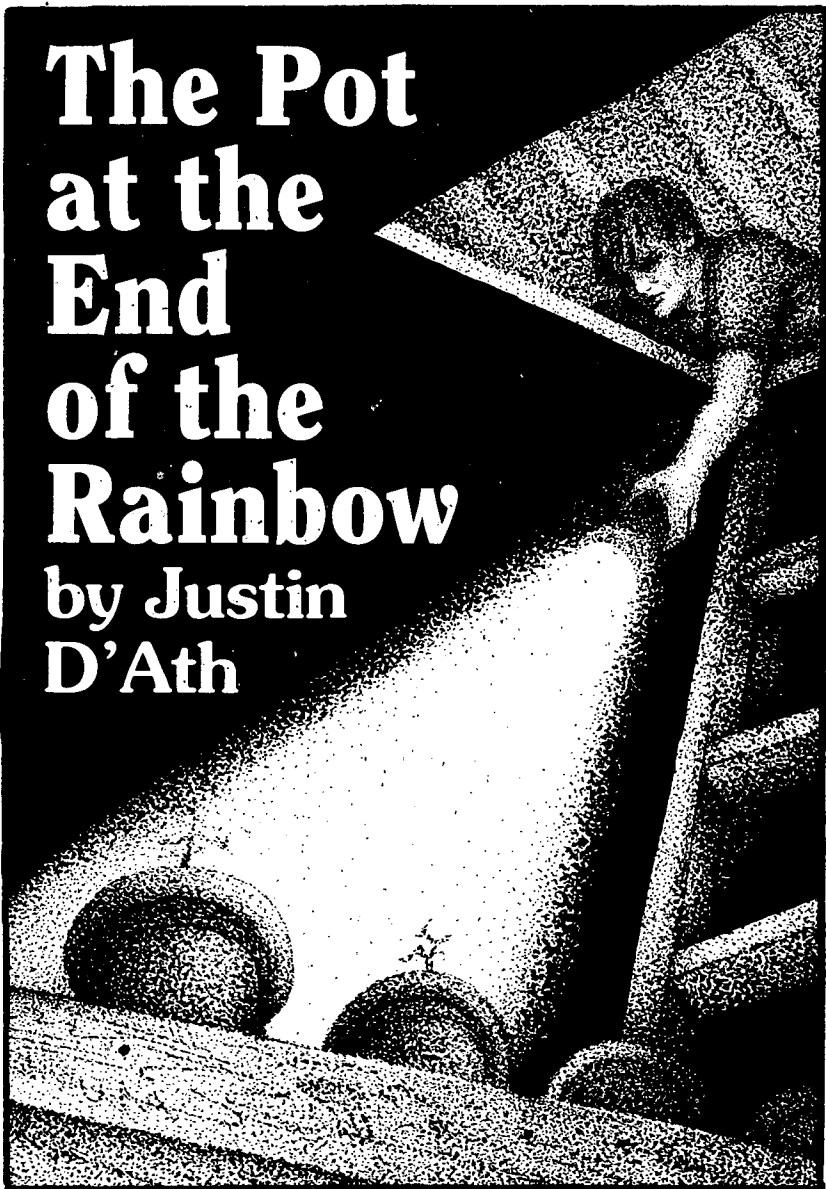
The body of Mrs. Williams was claimed by her husband, Wes Williams.

There is an oddity about Mr. Williams' behavior. When we called him to the station to tell him what had happened, he allegedly had not heard of the bank robbery or shootings. The news of his wife's death appeared to be an authentic surprise. Yet when we told him about Wansell's strange behavior, Williams said, "So it was him." This certainly sounds as though he had already heard of Wansell's actions and death, yet he could not have heard without knowing the rest. We cannot understand why Williams would pretend not to know about the robbery and his wife's death before we told him if in fact he did know.

The \$80,000 has been recovered.

FICTION

# The Pot at the End of the Rainbow by Justin D'Ath



The buyer turned his flashlight briefly on the face of the shadowy figure waiting for him behind the grandstands at the deserted Rainbow racetrack.

"What in tarnation!" he hissed, reaching instinctively inside his coat. "Is this a setup?"

"It's okay," the other said quickly. "Mr. Harvey sent me."

The buyer slowly removed his hand from inside his coat. Nervously, he directed the flashlight this way and that.

"Harvey didn't say you were Judge McGarry's kid," he breathed.

"Does it matter who I am?" the boy asked.

"Damn right it matters! How do I know you aren't setting me up for your old man?"

The boy's father had earned the nickname "Weedkiller" on account of the hard line he took against all drug offenders. In one now legendary case, he had sentenced a twelve-year-old girl to two years in reform school simply for being apprehended with a half-smoked joint in her school lunchbox.

"Mr. Harvey will vouch for me, sir."

The buyer shone his flashlight on the boy's carry-all. "Okay," he said finally. "I guess he wouldn't have organized this if he thought you weren't on the level. Let's see what you've got."

The boy unzipped the carry-all and removed a white plastic shopping bag. Opening it, the buyer shone his flashlight inside; then he reached in and brought out a handful of the powdery dry leaf. He sniffed it.

"Not bad," he nodded. "Local?"

"You could say that," the boy answered.

The buyer carefully closed the bag. He took a small scale from his pocket and weighed it.

"Let's say twelve ounces," he said.

"There's thirteen ounces there," the boy said nervously.

The buyer smiled. "We'll call it twelve and a half. Did Harvey tell you my price?"

"Yes, sir."

The man counted out some bills and handed them to the boy, who took the money, checked it, then stuffed it into the back pocket of his jeans.

The buyer said, "So when can you make another delivery?"

"I guess in a month or so . . ."

"If you can make it before New Year's, I'll up the price by fifty percent."

"I'll see what I can do," the boy promised.

"I'd appreciate it," the man nodded. "I've had to start buying interstate since Weed—" he checked himself—"since your dad began cracking down on my suppliers. Tell your grower," he added with a touch of irony, "that he's sitting on a gold mine."

"As far as the electricity company is concerned," the judge declared, "this house is a veritable gold mine!"

He pushed the electricity account across the table to his wife.

"Nearly three hundred dollars a month," he said. "Soon they'll have to build a whole new hydroelectric dam just to supply this single house."

"Maybe it's my fault, Dad," Bevan volunteered. "I've been using my kiln quite a lot lately."

"Well, you'd better start selling some of those silly pots you're making," McGarry Senior grumbled. He made no secret of his disapproval of his son's recent interest in pottery. In the judge's experience, it was the "hippy, arty types"—and he counted potters alongside painters, sculptors, and leatherworkers in this category—who most commonly got caught up in drugs. "At this rate," he said, "we'll all end up in the poorhouse."

Bevan smiled. "As a matter of fact, Dad, I did sell some pots yesterday."

"Bravo!" his father said sarcastically. "The boy actually sold some pots!"

"Don't be hard on him, Robert," Mrs. McGarry said. "At least it's a start."

"Here," Bevan placed two creased hundred dollar bills on top of the electricity account. "That should help keep us out of the poorhouse for another month."

His father's eyes became very wide. "You got all this from selling pots?" he said incredulously.

"It was a big order," Bevan explained. "A nurseryman from over in Flowerfield bought out my entire stock. And he's going to take everything I make from now on."

"Well, I'll be!" the judge said, folding the two bills carefully and slipping them inside his waistcoat. He winked across the table. "Haven't I always told you, son, that free enterprise gets rewarded in this country?"

The cost of electricity wasn't something Bevan had figured on.

But the plants had to have heat and light, and he didn't feel right about letting his parents foot the whole bill. In any case, he could afford to chip in now and then; it simply meant that he couldn't get the Harley-Davidson quite as soon as he'd originally planned.

It was Bevan McGarry's sense of fair play that had turned him to crime. He was a Libra, and it was in his nature to look at things from all angles, to consider the balance of justice not simply from the point of view of the law, but from the standpoint of everyone involved, law enforcers and lawbreakers equally. Unlike his father, who was a Leo and saw everything in black and white, McGarry Junior realized that the true color of justice was a murky shade of gray. Bevan had decided long ago that he would make a better—fairer—judge than his father.

Unknown to either of his parents, he had his career all mapped out. First he was going to serve his apprenticeship in the underworld, and then he would go on to study law. It made good sense, after all, that he familiarize himself with both sides of the business of crime. Know your enemy, as someone once said. And how fortuitous it was that Stage One of his training would finance Stage Two!

The Harley-Davidson was a bonus—a reward, if you like—for all the thankless toil Bevan was putting in for the good of society. Heaven knew, he didn't *enjoy* growing marijuana. It was hard work, dirty work. All those long hours spent tilling the soil, digging, watering, transplanting, harvesting—it wasn't easy for a young man unaccustomed to manual labor, unused to the humiliation of displaying indelible half-moons of dirt constantly under his fingernails.

And then there was the risk—the *physical* risk—of having to rub shoulders with the likes of Mr. Harvey and the gun-toting buyer. How close had he come to getting shot that first night? he wondered. He still had nightmares about it.

Lastly there was the mental anguish Bevan suffered as a result of having to deceive and lie to his parents. As a Libran, he found this especially difficult. So much so that occasionally he was driven to palliate his stricken conscience with a leaf or two from his crop, a practice he had come to term "quality control."

Yes, all things considered, he certainly deserved the Harley-Davidson. And a fitting symbol it would be, too, of the system of justice that one day he would come to represent. Ironically, it was his father, Weedkiller himself, who had pointed this out to him.



Who had, in fact, set Bevan's whole enterprise into motion.

The McGarrys, Mr., Mrs., and Junior, had been driving home from Sunday service about a year ago when the judge unexpectedly slowed the car in the middle of the deserted shopping district. He pulled in next to the curb and let the motor idle.

"See that, son?" he said.

He seemed to be looking into an adjacent shop, the front window of which displayed a large, glistening motorcycle.

"It's a motorcycle," Bevan said.

His father shook his head. "That's not a motorcycle, that's a Harley-Davidson. Symbol of our great nation," he said. "Land of the Free!"

From that moment Bevan knew he had to own that motorcycle.

The very next afternoon, on his way home from football practice, he detoured past the motorcycle shop and asked a salesman how much the Harley cost. The salesman must have seen Bevan's face drop when he heard the price.

"You'll have to start saving up your allowance," he smiled.

"Are you kidding?" Bevan said. "I only get five bucks a week."

"You're Weed—I mean, Judge McGarry's son, aren't you?" the salesman asked.

"Yes, sir," he admitted, blushing. Sometimes he wished he lived in a big city where nobody knew who he was. He looked forward to going away to college in two years' time.

The salesman was rubbing his chin thoughtfully. "You know," he said, "I've heard tell that that double story where you live is built slap on top of the old Rainbow mineshaft. Maybe you ought to get down in your cellar sometime and start digging. Who knows—" he winked "—you might strike gold."

Returning home that afternoon, Bevan mentioned to his mother what the motorcycle salesman had told him.

"I think it's a rumor," she said. "There used to be a mine somewhere around here about a hundred years ago, but no one knows the exact spot any more. The story goes that they sealed up the shaft when all the gold ran out. And then, years later, Mr. Macura bought the site and built this house on it."

Naturally Bevan knew all about Wally Macura—everyone did. He was the town's most notorious former citizen. A retired gangster who had moved down from Chicago in the thirties, he had later been brought before Bevan's grandfather, who was the judge at the time, when it was discovered that he was operating a nation-

wide opium ring. But the old man suffered a heart attack and died right there in the courtroom, and subsequently his whole crime network dissolved without a single conviction's being made. Furthermore, the opium source was never discovered.

Since the ex-gangster had no known relatives, Bevan's grandfather was able to pull a few strings and purchase Macura's empty house from the state for what was rumored to have been a bargain price. It had been the McGarry family home ever since.

Intrigued by the notion that he might have lived all of his sixteen and a half years on top of an abandoned gold mine, Bevan went down into the cellar that evening and began crawling around on the concrete floor tap-tapping with a small ball peen hammer and listening for echoes. But the floor seemed solid. Eventually he found himself at the far end of the cellar, next to the big old boiler that hadn't been used since his parents or his grandparents had installed natural gas sometime before Bevan was born. There was an eighteen inch gap behind the boiler, but it was too dark to see into and was full of cobwebs. Bevan reached gingerly into this dark, spider-infested space and lightly tapped the floor with the hammer. Tap tap, *clunk clunk*. It was hollow!

Probably something to do with the boiler, he told himself as he hurried back to the ladder leading up into the house. Pipes set into the floor or something. He didn't know much about boilers, but he imagined they had a fair bit of plumbing attached to them. It stood to reason that some of it would go underground—a drain perhaps. But where would a drain, presuming it was a drain, empty into? he asked himself.

A mineshaft!

By the time he had worked this out, Bevan had made his way upstairs and was returning with his father's big flashlight. This time, before descending all the way into the cellar, he paused on the ladder to pull the little door closed behind him. If that was the mineshaft behind the boiler, Bevan didn't want his parents to know. They would say it was too dangerous; his father would seal the entrance once and for all, and there would go Bevan's chance of ever owning the Harley-Davidson he had suddenly set his mind on.

At first, when he shone the flashlight into the space behind the boiler, Bevan felt a rush of disappointment. The floor there was paved with bricks. That would explain the difference in sound when he'd tapped them with the hammer. Then he noticed that

the bricks seemed to be very close together; there was no cement between them. It was as if they were just sitting there, loose. They were set about a quarter of an inch lower than the rest of the floor. Bevan used the hammer to push down on the corner of one of the bricks and, sure enough, it moved.

He would need something thin to prize the first of the bricks loose. After that it would simply be a case of lifting the others out. Bevan looked around for something to use. There was a big rusty open-ended wrench hanging from a wire hook on the side of the boiler. Bevan reached for it and noticed that its handle-end had been ground flat, into a sort of blade; it was almost as if the wrench had been modified specifically for the purpose of prizing up the loose bricks. Bevan worked the blade into one of the cracks and levered a brick out. Underneath it was a patch of dark wood.

Soon he had all the bricks stacked in three piles beside the boiler. In the recessed space the bricks had occupied was a narrow rectangle of wooden planks. A loop of heavy wire, obviously a makeshift handle, protruded from the nearest of the planks. Bevan took hold of it and pulled. The trapdoor lifted slowly upwards on protesting hinges. A draft of chill air hit him in the face. And what was that smell? It reminded him of the science lab at school. Heart thumping, Bevan shone the flashlight down into the dark space underneath the boiler. The first thing he saw was a clay flowerpot.

The mayor was addressing a special public meeting in the Town Hall.

"... And so it is with mixed feelings that I ask our good friend and, as of tomorrow, former judge, Weed—" the mayor was suddenly seized by a violent fit of coughing—"that I ask our good friend Bob McGarry to step forward."

Everyone clapped as the familiar, portly figure of Judge McGarry made its way to the podium. He shook hands with the mayor, who looked flushed—presumably an after-effect from his coughing fit—and took his place at the microphone.

"Thank you," the judge said once the applause had died down. "When I decided a few months ago to retire on my fiftieth birthday, I had no idea that my resignation would occasion such a response as this. I feel deeply honored. Furthermore," he went on, "I take it as a ratification that, despite a certain reference to herbicides—" nervous laughter—"the position I have upheld against drugs in

this community is shared by the majority of its upstanding citizens."

There was tumultuous applause. In the back, a rowdy element in the crowd began a chant of "Weedkiller, Weedkiller . . ." that brought boos and hisses and a ripple of good-natured laughter. The mayor stepped forward and held up his hand for silence.

"And now it is my pleasant duty," he said, "to hand over to you, Judge McGarry, as a token of our gratitude, the keys to our peaceable and drug free—" more laughter "—town." He waited until the crowd was quiet once more. "And also," he added, "a small monetary bonus, with which you might like to buy a new set of golf clubs, or perhaps a small fishing runabout, to help while away your next fifty years."

McGarry accepted the symbolic key and looked, in surprise, at the amount on the check. It was considerable.

"Runabout be blowed!" he said. "I'm going to get myself a motorbike."

**A**ltogether there were four thousand eight hundred and fifteen of them (although Bevan wouldn't know this for another three weeks when he finally finished counting the little clay pots), all neatly filled with soil, all lined up in precise, soldierly rows in three separate tunnels radiating out from the deep, central shaft that led down from the McGarrys' cellar. And each flowerpot contained a single plant, long dead, of course, and so frail and desiccated that they turned to powder when Bevan touched them. Even so, thanks to the rarefied subterranean atmosphere and a complete lack of insects and microorganisms to break down the dead vegetation, it was still possible to identify the species of plant that had once been cultivated in this secret underground nursery. Even Bevan knew a poppy when he saw one.

He had discovered the source of Wally Macura's opium empire.

Banks of powerful lights hung from the heavy timber beams that supported the rocky ceiling. Bevan guessed that these simulated sunshine, provided warmth and light for the growing plants. The entire lighting system was operated by a single switch screwed to a beam beside the ladder that led down from the cellar. A heavy cable had been fed through a hole in the ceiling; presumably it was connected to the house's electrical circuitry. When Bevan threw the switch, all but eighty-four of the fourteen hundred twenty light globes blazed into light.

Macura's watering system was equally ingenious. Each of the three tunnels was equipped with a forty-four gallon drum mounted on an ore cart. Rigged to each drum was a simple water pump that supplied a row of shower roses fitted to a one inch pipe that extended a yard on either side of the cart. The pump was operated by a lever attached off-center to one of the cart's wheels. All you had to do was slowly push the cart along the narrow-gauge railway track that ran down the center of each tunnel, and the flowerpots on either side of it were watered.

To fill the drums there was a hose and a gate-valve attached to a pipe that came down from the house. Bevan turned the valve and, sure enough, water began trickling out of the hose.

"So, Bev, your old man decided to call it a day," the buyer said as he weighed the sack of marijuana.

Bevan chuckled. "I bet you were pleased to hear that, Ray."

It was the fourth or fifth time they had met, and they called each other by first names now.

"You better believe it," Ray said. "For a while there—at least until you came along, little buddy—I thought I'd have to start looking for another line of work."

Bevan cleared his throat. He felt uneasy all of a sudden. "That's something I'd like to talk about," he said. "You see, Ray, after my next delivery I won't be able to supply you any more."

"You're having me on!"

"I'm serious. After my next drop I'm packing it in."

The buyer was counting out hundred dollar bills. "If it's money," he said, "I can go another fifteen—the hell with it!—let's say another twenty percent. How does that sound, Bev?"

"It isn't money," he said.

The buyer narrowed his eyes. "Have you found another market?"

"I'm going away to college," Bevan explained.

"Damn!" said Ray. "But what's wrong with the college here in Rainbow?"

"I've got to go somewhere good. I want to do law."

The buyer clapped a hand dramatically to his forehead. "I should have known it," he groaned. "I should never have gotten in with the son of a judge!"

"Don't worry, Ray, it'll be a long time before I'm finished at the university. And then I'll probably be stuck in some law office shuffling papers for another ten or twenty years."

The buyer seemed to collect himself. "So what am I supposed to do," he asked, "after you stop supplying? I've got clients all over who've come to depend on me. At least give me the name of your grower," he pleaded.

"I'm sorry," Bevan shook his head. "I can't do that, Ray."

"But he'll need someone to market his product for him after you're gone."

Bevan shrugged. "That's his business, I guess. But I gave him my word that I'd never let on who he is."

"Even when you're a legal eagle?" Ray said.

"Especially when I'm a legal eagle," Bevan said.

There was an underground laboratory where Macura must have refined his opium. Bevan looked over the various mortars and beakers and weird-looking retorts, but he was careful not to touch anything. Chemistry was one of his worst subjects at school; even under the direct supervision of his science teacher, he was loath to add one colorless liquid to another because he harbored irrational fears of creating invisible toxic gases or causing violent explosions.

In a cupboard under one of the laboratory benches, he found a sack of seeds with a date scrawled on it in pencil: "2/14/36." Obviously they were poppy seeds. He wondered if they would still be fertile after all this time? He tipped a couple into his palm and stood gazing thoughtfully at the rows and rows of empty flowerpots stretching away into the distance.

It came to Bevan in a flash how he could earn enough to buy the Harley-Davidson. And to put himself through law school without having to rely on the money his father made convicting almost-innocent twelve-year-olds.

No, his Libra's over-developed sense of right and wrong cautioned him. Opium is a dangerous drug; it's bad.

And then he had another idea.

Bevan was a member of his high school's senior debating team. Several months earlier they had made it all the way to the state finals of the high school Debating Championships. They had lost the grand final, but in their semifinal they had come up against the much fancied team from neighboring Flowerfield High. The topic of that debate was: "Marijuana should be legalized." His team had taken the affirmative position, arguing in favor of removing marijuana from the banned drugs list, and thanks mostly to

Bevan's own incisive rhetoric they had won.

Although he had not thought much about the subject beforehand, Bevan came away from the competition convinced that the arguments he had put forth during the debate were sound: *Marijuana was not dangerous; it did not cause addiction; therefore it ought not to be illegal.*

Over breakfast one morning shortly after the debating championships, he and his father had had an argument on the subject.

"It's against the law," McGarry Senior had stated in his didactic, Leo voice, "so it's wrong."

"Has it ever occurred to you," asked McGarry Junior, "that sometimes the law might be wrong?"

"The law is never wrong."

"If the law said eating cornflakes was wrong," Bevan asked, "would you arrest me?"

"Don't speak with food in your mouth," the judge growled.

Obtaining cannabis seeds was more difficult than he had imagined. The main problem was who he was—Weedkiller's son. Nobody with underworld connections wanted to have anything to do with him.

"Don't make me laugh!" Hec Stirton at the billiard saloon growled. "I'm out of work because of your old man."

Finally it was old Desmond Harvey, who did car detailing at Mollison Ford, who put Bevan on the right track.

"What do you want them seeds for?"

"It's a science project for school," Bevan said.

Harvey chortled. "Tha's the best I've heard in a while. Well," he said, polishing his wire-framed glasses, "you tell a pretty good lie, son, I'll give yer that."

"It isn't a lie," Bevan insisted.

"All right," the old man said, "tha's enough. Worse thing in the world is a liar. Do you believe that?"

Bevan shrugged sheepishly.

"Yeah, well," Harvey grinned, "I might of been lyin' meself. Tell you what," he said suddenly, "let's do a deal."

"What sort of deal?"

"A trade. You git something for me, I'll get you all set up for yer science projec'."

"What do you want?" Bevan asked doubtfully.



"That little wood hammer your daddy uses when he says shush-up in the court."

"The gavel. What do you want that for?"

Harvey grinned. "To crack nuts with."

Bevan said, "You're not stringing me along are you, Mr. Harvey?"

In fact, the full story, which Bevan wasn't to learn for another few months, was that Harvey had once been jailed by Judge McGarry on a minor drug offense and he had been particularly irritated by the way he'd banged the gavel when pronouncing sentence. *Four-bang-teen-bang-months!* He wanted the gavel as a kind of moral revenge.

"Cross me heart and hope to die," Harvey said now, crossing his heart. "It's a test, see," he explained, "to make sure you want them seeds bad enough."

"I want them, all right."

"Okay. Then git me that li'l ol' hammer," Harvey said. "And one more thing," he added. "I want twenty percent."

Bevan frowned. "Twenty percent of what?"

"Of your science projec', what do yer think?"

"Ten," Bevan said.

"Fifteen."

"Twelve and a half."

"Okay," Harvey nodded. "But first," he said, "git me that li'l wood hammer."

Afterwards, Bevan often looked back on his first crime as his most serious one. While the gavel was not, strictly speaking, the judge's personal property (it belonged to the court), he had grown fond of it over the years. It was the same gavel his father, Bevan's grandfather, had used throughout his own long career on the bench. With that gavel, for instance, the court had been brought to order after the notorious Wally Macura collapsed in the witness stand. The present Judge McGarry had lost count of the number of times he had used it to silence the unruly friends and families of pushers and drug offenders he'd sent down over the years. Although not a sentimental man, Weedkiller McGarry looked on the gavel as something of an old friend. Indeed, he figured that he quite literally owned a small stake in it—or at least its handle. Following the 1967 trial, on LSD charges, of a so-called "guru"—the rowdy members of whose commune all turned up to support

him in court—the judge had had to replace its cracked handle with a piece of hickory he himself had whittled from the tree in his front yard.

On weekends Judge McGarry was in the habit of bringing the gavel home and rubbing it with linseed oil. Which made Bevan's first crime a relatively simple one. Simple in theory, but difficult in practice.

*No!* Bevan's overdeveloped sense of justice raged at him as he crept barefoot into his father's den late on the Friday night after he had met with Mr. Harvey. *You can't steal from your own father!* The gavel doesn't even belong to Dad, he rationalized.

*It belongs to the court!* his conscience rallied. *That's even worse—stealing from the court!*

Bevan stopped halfway to his father's desk. He almost turned at that point and retreated forever from his criminal future, but suddenly, in his mind's eye, he saw the glistening Harley-Davidson.

Would you sacrifice all you hold to be true simply for a motorcycle? his pesky conscience demanded.

And then he remembered what his father had said about the Harley-Davidson: it was a symbol of America, Land of the Free.

You'll never be free if you go through with this! his conscience warned.

I'm doing this for the good of mankind, Bevan told himself. Snatching up the gavel, he turned and fled.

"Frankly," the salesman confided, "I didn't think I was ever going to sell it. Kids nowadays seem more interested in Japanese bikes."

The former judge shook his head sadly. "They don't know quality when they see it."

"You said it," agreed the salesman. "All except that son of yours, Wee—Mr. McGarry. Now there's a young man who's got his head screwed on."

McGarry seemed surprised. "Why do you say that?" he asked.

"Well," said the salesman, "for one thing, he has the same taste in motorbikes as his father."

"I didn't know that," McGarry frowned.

"He was in here about a year ago," the salesman told him, "looking at this very bike you've bought today. Seemed a little disappointed when I told him the price."

"That was a year ago," McGarry said. "I shouldn't think the price would bother him now."

The salesman looked mystified. "Why's that?" he asked. "Did he strike gold under that house of yours?"

The former Judge "Weedkiller" McGarry slipped on his motorcycle helmet. "You could say that," he said. "Fact is, he's gone into the pot manufacturing business."

**B**evan's new hobby was a ruse. He had needed a plausible explanation to account for all the time he was having to spend down in the cellar tending his marijuana crop. And some way to explain the sudden wealth that he correctly anticipated would result from his first harvest. Since he was already over-supplied with clay flowerpots, and his subterranean gardening was taking an indelible toll in calluses and dirty fingernails, pottery seemed the ideal cover.

He bought a second-hand potter's wheel at a garage sale. Then, with Mr. Harvey's help, he obtained a small broken-down kiln from the old brickworks near the tip. (It didn't matter that it was not in working order; what was important was that it *looked* as though it worked.) With the kiln and the potter's wheel delivered to the cellar, all that was required was to set up a couple of trestle tables, scatter a few pails and dirty rags and empty flowerpots around the place, and—presto!—he had what looked like a busy, if slightly disorganized, home pottery.

Beyond a cursory tour of inspection of his "studio" at the beginning of his enterprise, Bevan's parents never went down there. The ladder was rickety and old. And Bevan had been careful not to disturb any of the many large cobwebs draped around the cellar. He had even highlighted some of the more prominent ones by sprinkling flour over them and adding a few dead insects he'd collected from the garden shed. Just to make sure neither of his parents would venture down there on their own, he mentioned that two days earlier he had seen a snake disappearing behind the old boiler.

"But don't worry," he said reassuringly, "I don't think it'll come out as long as the light is on."

And then he flicked the light off, a joke neither of his parents found particularly funny.

McGarry Senior stopped at the side of the road just beyond the

town perimeter. In the shadow of the large sign that said WELCOME TO RAINBOW, DRUG-FREE ZONE, he removed his helmet and stowed it in one of the Harley-Davidson's big fiberglass panniers. Then he kicked the machine back into life and roared off down the highway.

This is the life, he thought, enjoying the massager-like throb of the powerful, 1300 cc, V-twin engine underneath him and savoring the buffeting summer heat in his face, the wind in his hair—or, at least, what was left of his hair.

I could grow used to this, former Judge “Weedkiller” McGarry said to himself. Yes indeed!

Humming the chorus of “Born to Be Wild,” he watched the speedometer needle push up towards ninety.

Pretty soon he slowed and made a cautious U-turn. Then he set out along the way he had come. When he arrived at the edge of town, he stopped again to put his helmet on. He didn't want anyone to get the wrong impression. He had his reputation to uphold.

He noticed as he was strapping on the helmet that already the petrol tank and the headlight of his brand new motorcycle were smeared with road dirt and squashed bugs. My fault, he upbraided himself, for riding too fast. Still, it was a nice sunny day. He would give the Harley a wash when he got home.

As he rumbled back out onto the blacktop, McGarry couldn't help but glance up at the big sign that greeted visitors to Rainbow. DRUG-FREE ZONE. That gave him a feeling of pride. No other town in the state could make such a boast. And it was all thanks to him. Weedkiller, he mused, and he laughed. Let them poke fun at him! As he saw it, his nickname was a measure of his success. He'd jailed every drug trafficker and user who had come into his court. And the rest had got the message and left town. Drug-free Zone. It was only after that sign went up that Judge McGarry had decided to retire.

His life's work was done.

Bevan sat down among his pots and rolled himself a joint. Increasingly in these twilight weeks of his career in crime, he found himself turning to the more compensatory aspects of his work. Quality control, he told himself, was more important now than it had ever been. According to Ray, his leaf was famous all over the state for its potency, and Bevan derived a certain job satisfaction from this knowledge. He liked to be good at what he did, even if at the moment that meant he was good at being a lawbreaker.

(Criminal, he had decided, was too strong a word for it.) In any event, he had his self-respect to uphold as well as his—albeit clandestine—reputation. He would hate to disappoint Ray's many satisfied customers by delivering a below standard crop with his last harvest.

And, damn it, he was *proud* of his pot!

This leaf was good. So good, in fact, that Bevan began to hallucinate. He imagined, as he puffed, that he heard a low rumble of thunder. Impossible, of course, so far underground. And after a few more puffs it began to rain.

"Wow!" Bevan breathed, holding the three-quarters-used joint out in front of him so he could admire it. "I've smoked up a thunderstorm!"

Plop, plop, plop! He watched the big raindrops landing all around him. Water glistened on the leaves of the nearest marijuana plants. It sizzled on the light globes. This was really far out! Then a drop landed smack on his forehead.

"Cool!" Bevan said.

And indeed it was cool. In fact, it was cold. Bevan shivered. You'd think an hallucinatory rainstorm would be warm, he said to himself. After all, marijuana is meant to relax you. He took a long drag at the joint, but it didn't make any difference—the drops of water that continued to fall on him remained startlingly, bracingly cold.

Bevan sang, "Raindrops keep falling on my head, just like the . . ." He stopped singing. Just like the what? He couldn't remember any more of the song.

He puffed on the joint and tried again: "Raindrops keep falling on my head, just like the . . ." It was no good.

What are raindrops like? he asked himself.

Another one hit him—splat!—right on the nose.

He looked up. He realized he was sitting right underneath one of the former gold mine's ventilation shafts. He didn't have a flashlight with him, but he knew from prior investigations that the shaft went up about fifteen feet and stopped at a dark, wooden partition. Obviously it had been boarded up after the mine closed.

Bevan pushed himself to his feet and looked carefully around him. That's interesting, he thought. He had noticed that his hallucinatory rainstorm seemed confined to the area of the capped ventilation shaft.

\*

Former Judge "Weedkiller" McGarry, a pail of sudsy water in one hand and a dripping chamois in the other, took three steps back across the lawn to better admire his handiwork.

"Why, you gorgeous, gorgeous thing!" he murmured lovingly.

He had just dropped the chamois into the pail and was stooping to pick up the trickling hose when the object of his admiration, a glistening Harley-Davidson Fatboy just two hours out of the showroom, tipped ever-so-slowly sideways and, with a bubbly sound that could best be likened to the aural by-product of an indiscreet release of flatulence, disappeared into the bowels of the earth.

A shaft of bright sunlight had accompanied the Harley-Davidson's unexpected arrival in the center of the leafy underground crop, and now this sunshine refracted in the spray of falling water to form an exquisite rainbow. Entranced, Bevan let his eyes follow the rainbow's graceful curve upwards.

"Dad!" he said, surprised but not at all unhappy to see his father standing on the lip of the open ventilation shaft with a hose in his hand. "Hey, Dad," Bevan said, "guess what I found!"

"Guess what *I* found," Weedkiller said.

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## **SOLUTION TO THE NOVEMBER "UNSOLVED":**

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Earl Maris, the journalist from South Dakota, killed Dan Queen, the lawyer from Utah.

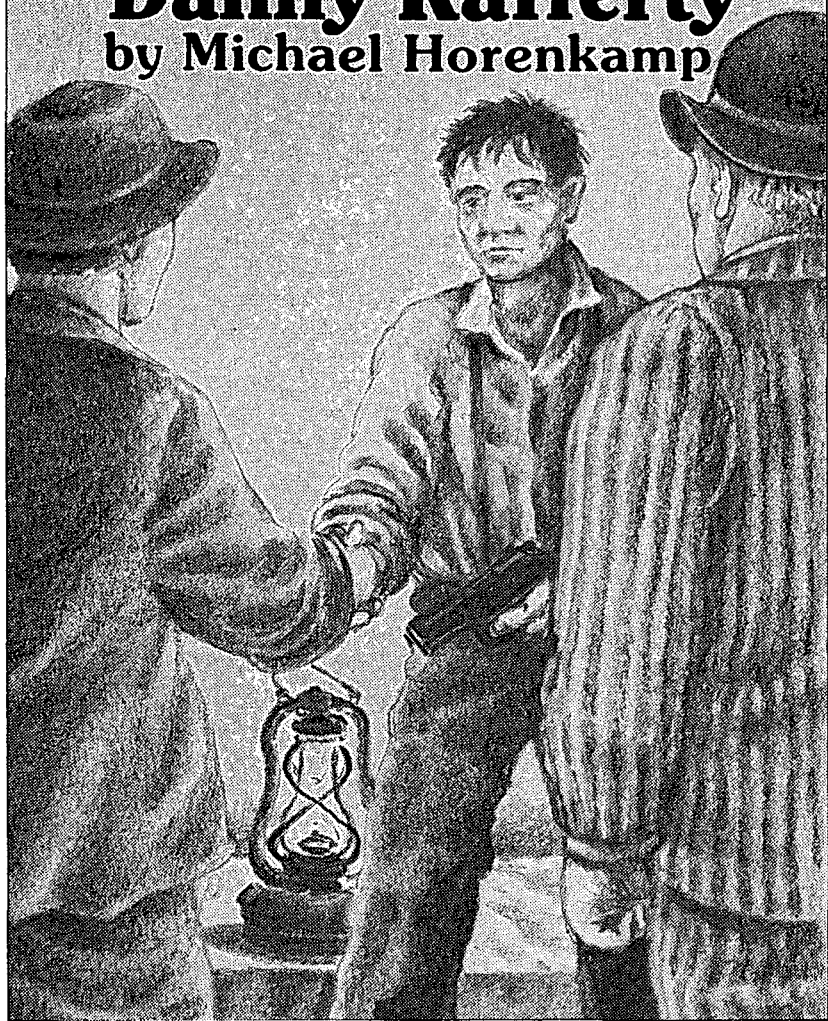
HUSBAND	WIFE	HOME	PROFESSION
Amos Reade	Clara	Virginia	geologist
Bart Paris	Ellen	Texas	engineer
Chet O'Dell	Doris	Wyoming	hunter
Dan Queen	Betty	Utah	lawyer
Earl Maris	Flora	S. Dakota	journalist
Fred Nader	Alice	Tennessee	contractor



FICTION

# The Loss of Danny Rafferty

by Michael Horenkamp



*Illustration by Donald Cook*

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**H**atty Finnegan had just stepped out of his Franklin Avenue saloon onto the sidewalk that afternoon so many years ago when a carload of lads came squealing their tires around the corner of Twelfth Street and cut loose with sawed-off shotguns and automatic pistols. When the ambulance arrived, the attendants didn't even bother to check the old boy's pulse, just hauled what was left of him to the City Hospital where the doc took one look and stood aside for the coroner.

Everybody assumed it was Danny Rafferty, a big gun with the Cuckoos, who did it. He had a personal grudge against Hatty, who was a high lieutenant with the Egan Rats. Nobody knew the nature of the ill feeling between the two, probably not even Hatty or Danny any more. Grudges were abundant in St. Louis in those days among the bootleggers and hijackers and extortionists. They were all members of one gang or another, wreaking havoc on this block or that in the downtown district.

For me, Hatty's death was an occasion for mourning, chiefly because someone else I could beat at cards had gone on to that big green felt table in the sky. Like most of the birds I

played in those days, Hatty was a poor hand with the Bicycles—impatient, impulsive, and reckless when he thought things were going his way. But he always welcomed me to the table, and when I cashed in, he paid. I was going miss him.

Well then, it was early in the evening the day after Hatty's untimely demise. Yours truly—Fogarty's the name, Terry Fogarty—was far from the scene of the crime, up on the northwest end of the central district. I was trolling the Jazzland Club for fish who might be interested in a game of draw. The management knew me and was always happy to provide use of the back room for a cut off the top.

The place, at the corner of Grand and Easton avenues, was still quiet, and I was standing a round of paint for a couple of yeggs who looked as if they might have a little cash they could be separated from. They were talking about cards, a topic they thought they had brought up, and how maybe we could get up a game, when Phil Haines walked in. He looked around, checked behind his back on the street, then made his way over to me.

"Dangle," said Phil to my fish, and they left in a hurry, for he was a mean customer and it showed. While Phil was

an inch or two below average height, his hulking bulk and heavy, square face with its large, flat features made you wonder whether he didn't have scars on the backs of his hands from dragging them across the ground. His hair was blond and curly, and his eyes were a deep blue, but arctic in their aspect. I was not reassured to have them glaring at me.

"Rafferty wantsa see ya," Phil said. He was Danny's sidekick, a loyal one. So loyal, in fact, that I don't think anyone, not even Phil, thought of him as anything else. It was risky for him to be visible in a place like Jazzland. Word was out that a lot of the downtown boys were not pleased over the loss of Hatty and wanted to make it even by bumping off Danny. Phil was likely to draw some fire.

"Hello, Phil," I replied. "How are you this evening? Let me buy you a drink."

"Rafferty wantsa see ya. Let's go, College Boy." That's what the roughhouse crowd called me in those days, College Boy. While I didn't much care for the moniker, most of the people who used it were not the type I wanted to quarrel with, Phil being a sterling example.

We left the club and climbed into a gleaming Paige sedan parked at the curb and Phil

drove downtown. He turned right on Jefferson, and we went almost to Chouteau Avenue near Eleventh Street. It was a rundown commercial district of aging soot-stained brick and concrete buildings. Dotting the neighborhood were many small saloons where you could, if you wished, mingle with the Cuckoo minions.

Phil and I left the car, and he led me through a network of alleys and back streets to some basement steps littered with trash and guarded by a wobbly railing of wrought iron. We descended the steps to a door, where Phil knocked in a specific pattern. That, I presumed, was to let whoever was on the other side know not to cut loose with his roscoe before he knew who was calling.

The room was a cement cubicle with a kerosene lamp on a packing crate for light. Scattered on the floor were empty tin cans and dead bottles of bootleg jack. Each created an eerie puddle of reflected light that I vaguely felt I should be careful not to step in. A bed had been fashioned by throwing a dirty brown army blanket over three or four crates pushed into a row.

Danny Rafferty sat on the makeshift cot. He was unshaven, his black hair hung in lank tangles over his forehead,

and his dark eyes were feverish. One look told me he was hopped, which was not a good thing. Danny was volatile enough when his blood was relatively free of the happy dust. Under its influence, who knew what mayhem he might unleash?

"Fogarty," he said as he stood up and came toward me, "thanks for comin'." He stuck out a hand for me to shake. The other held an automatic.

"Funny," I said, and glanced at Phil who stood with his arms folded across his chest, "I wasn't aware I had a choice." But I shook hands. It seemed the prudent thing to do.

"Siddown," Danny said, and motioned me to another crate. "I hadda send Phil to make sure you'd come. I'm in a real fix."

I think that was a cue for me to offer to help in any way I could, but I merely sat and looked at him.

"Look, College Boy," Danny said, "I didn't kill Hatty Finnegan. I hated the son of a bitch, and I'm glad he's dead, but I didn't do it, see. Whoever did it, I find out who it was, I'll kill 'em myself just to show the boys I'm right."

"Fine, Danny," I replied, "but why tell me? I'm hardly the one you have to convince."

"This is a bad time for me," Danny said. "I got deals goin', I need to be out in the open where I can talk to the right people."

Deals, of course, meant a still out in the country. It wouldn't produce a suitable profit if Danny himself wasn't there to enforce the responsible behavior in the drinking and selling of the product by the fine lads who got involved in such enterprises. The "right people," don't you know.

I shook my head. "I don't get it, Danny. Hatty was one of the Rats. It's the Egans that are mad. I've got about as much pull with them as the Kaiser has with Coolidge. Why talk to me?"

"Why, you can talk to your old man and your brother, the monsignor. Your dad can tell the Egans I didn't do it and he won't be happy if any harm comes to me. They'll listen to him, a bigshot lawyer that's got so many of 'em off."

"And your brother could call a few of the boys and talk about mercy and all that other guff he's always spouting. Tell 'em I'll make it worth their while. And yours, too."

"Tell them yourself," I suggested.

"I gotta stay low until this thing cools off," he said.

Phil gave a little snort. The sound startled me. I had forgotten he was in the room.

"It's a truth," Danny said, not quite yelling. "I show my ass outside of this room, it gets shot off."

"Yer sittin' down here goin' crazy," Phil said. "It's makin' you yella."

"I ain't yella," Danny shouted and moved toward Phil, bringing up the automatic as he went forward. I jumped from my crate and hurried to a spot that I calculated would draw the least amount of flying lead.

Phil didn't move a muscle. His head was tilted to the side and back as if he couldn't see Danny and me except out of the corner of his eye. His dark derby was cocked on his head at a jaunty angle, but his manner was less than frolicsome.

"You gonna kill me now, Danny?" Phil asked with a sneer. "You and me been friends since we were kids and you're gonna kill me just like that, hey?"

Danny stopped in his tracks, his arm went slack, and the gun hung in his fist at his side. I let the air out of my lungs, and my shoulders slumped like deadweight.

Danny turned and walked back to his blanket-covered crates where he flopped down.

He set the gun aside and sat slumped against the wall, then shut his eyes tight, squeezed them so that his forehead creased into deep furrows. His hands rose to his face, and I thought he might cry.

With a sudden jerk, he pulled his hands away and sat up, eyes wide. "I'm gonna get outa here," he said. His voice was calm. "This is just to get some insurance." He stood and planted himself squarely in front of me. "Right, College Boy? You're gonna get me some insurance, ain'tcha?"

Phil's voice was a growl. "He ain't gonna get you nothin'. The only thing's gonna get you anything is gettin' outa here and doin' what's gotta be done. There's shootin', then that's how it is. We done shootin' before."

"There don't have to be no shootin'," Danny said. "The boys think I killed Hatty, which is a mistake. They know that, they'll let me alone and nobody's gotta get killed. That's why I got Fogarty here."

"You gotta get outa this hole," Phil said. "It's eatin' you up bein' down here. You gotta get out." His voice sounded almost—not quite—as if he were pleading.

"I'll get out, I will," Danny shouted. "Now, shut up, Phil, just shut up."

Phil's features were a knot of lines and lumps. He stood with his hands dangling before him as if he wanted to use them, but wasn't sure how.

Danny turned to me. "You'll talk to your old man and the monsignor, right?"

I shrugged. "Sure," I said. "I'll talk to them. But I can't make any guarantees."

"Thanks, Fogarty, I owe ya," Danny said. We shook hands again and I left, escorted by Phil.

It was dark by that time. The street lights were on. I noticed the lettering on a glassfront across the street. "*CIGARS*" was all I could make out.

"Y'know what I think, College Boy?" Phil asked, and grabbed my arm.

"No, Phil, but suppose you tell me."

"I think maybe you might get the idea to pick up some dough telling somebody where Danny's hiding out. That's what I think."

I yanked my arm from Phil's grasp.

"You ever heard that I welshed on a bet?" I asked. "Played a crooked hand? Didn't pay what I owed? Sold out a friend or anybody else?"

Phil didn't say anything, just kept looking at me.

"No," I said. "You never heard anything like that be-

cause it never happened. I gave Danny the shake and said I'd do what I could and I will."

It was a fine display of indignation. You couldn't have found better at the Shubert. For my finale, I turned on my heel and walked away. I kept waiting for the sound of a shot, for the slug to pass between my shoulder blades, but it didn't happen. Phil had decided to let me live.

I went over to Twelfth Street and hopped a car, grateful for the bright light inside and the sullen faces of my fellow passengers. I sat down and sucked in great lungfuls of air. It was good to be alive.

The next morning I was up early—not my usual habit in those days—and caught a car downtown to see my dad, the "bigshot lawyer," in his office.

His first response was directed at me rather than the situation I presented.

"This is what you're doing now?" he asked. "Representing gangsters?"

"Why not?" I retorted. "You do it. It's a family tradition."

He fixed on me a look that I had seen him use in court—on witnesses, opposing attorneys and occasionally a judge. It was a blend of scorn, pity, and amusement at the inability of a lesser being to comprehend what was going on around him.

Mostly Dad used this tactic when he couldn't think of anything to say.

"So, will you help Danny out or not?" I asked.

"Let him rot."

I looked at my father for a moment. He was in his fifties then, tall, trim as a tiger, hair still dark except for a little gray at the temples. There, amidst the mahogany furniture and the leatherbound lawbooks, he was the picture of a lawyer.

"Danny Rafferty is your client," I said. This was not the world's strongest argument. Dad had been his lawyer, but the charge, for extortion I think, had been weak. It was thrown out, and the two had long gone their separate ways.

"Was," snapped Dad. "And so was Hatty Finnegan, and the Hats was also my friend. He had more class in his homburg than Rafferty's got in his whole family, if he's got one."

The homburg reference was to Hatty's headgear. All his life he had taken care to be well-dressed, especially above the ears. Even in St. Louis, where the soot-filled air could make you dirty just strolling down the avenue, the Finnegan chapeau was always spiffy, and I do mean spanking clean. In later years, he kept extra hats in his office at the saloon and would send a flunky to fetch a

new one if he thought the one he was wearing had lost its proper sheen. Hence, the nickname "Hatty."

"You're bearing a grudge over a hat?" I asked.

"Don't be glib with me," Dad said. "May I remind you that Hatty was Democratic committeeman for the 14th Ward. He backed Simmons for the criminal corrections post, which gave me some leverage with that venal nitwit. Now I've lost it because Rafferty can't control his trigger finger, and clients of mine will suffer."

"Rafferty says he didn't do it."

Once again, I got the look. This time there was an edge to it. Everybody *knew* Rafferty had done it, the look said, and so did Mr. Fogarty's younger son, if he used the brains the Good Lord gave him.

"There were no witnesses," I said, "so nobody knows for sure."

"As a matter of fact," Dad replied, "I hear from people I know at the department that there was one, a colored janitor. He saw the whole thing. He tried to get away, but ran right into the officer walking the beat."

"Can he identify anyone?"

"He says not, of course. What else would a colored man say to a bunch of white coppers trying

to track down a white killer? But I hear they got some kind of statement out of him anyway."

"Well, he didn't identify Rafferty," I said.

Suddenly Dad turned on me. He was angry. I could see the water brimming in his eyes.

"Damn it, Terry, I do not understand you. Why do you do this to your mother and me?"

"Do what?"

"This. Spend time with these people. Take up for them. A gambler the papers call you, a 'police character.'"

"I got picked up in a few speakeasy raids. I was fined for gambling once. It's not as if I'm a gang leader."

"With your education, your brains, your war record, you could be someone in this town. If you'd just go to law school ..."

"I don't want to go to law school," I said. "One damned degree is enough. And I don't want to remind people of my part in the Great War. To hell with what happened 'Over There.'"

His shoulders sagged a little; he looked down at his desk, then sat down in his chair, a grand, wingbacked affair of maroon leather held in place by rows of brass studs.

He sighed and smiled wanly at me.

"Aren't you ever going to tell me how you got that Silver Star?"

I couldn't look at him. "I can't tell you," I said. "Not now, not yet."

He fiddled with some papers. "I was very proud of you, you know, when you came home." His voice trailed off.

"I'm sorry things didn't turn out the way you wanted, Dad."

As you might imagine, I left my father's office in no mood to see other family members. But I had promised Danny that I would also talk to my brother, the monsignor.

The Reverend Michael Fogarty was an easy man to find. All you had to do was ask any bum on the streets of St. Louis. Michael, with the blessing of the archdiocese, ran a Working Man's Hotel on Eleventh Street, where he helped the downtrodden, the poor, the drunks, and anybody else who needed a lift to try to get back on his feet. Likely as not when one of the boys did get back on his feet, he used them to toddle right back to his old ways, but Michael was a man of abiding faith. Also, to give my older brother his due, I think he truly loved the bums and cons and drunks to whom he chose to minister.

The "hotel" was a big Georgian building, old, with a lot of



heavy wood around the windows and doors. Inside, the lobby had a few rickety chairs. One old boy in work clothes sat reading the want ads out of the *Star* from the day before. There was a threadbare rug on a hardwood floor that badly needed varnish. But the place was warm and clean. A crucifix hung on one yellowed wall.

Michael was in his office, the door to which was open. It always was. He saw everyone and made whoever was in his presence feel special and welcome. The good Irish manner, it was all his. He also had the traditional Hibernian red hair and in his youth there had been freckles, but they had faded or blended into a ruddy glow of fine feeling and good humor. His grin carried a hint of mischief, as if he might have been a leprechaun in training.

"Terry," he said, and got up to come around his desk and shake my hand. "How are you, little brother?" He made a point of looking up at me when he said little for I was the one who got the height in the family.

I looked around as I sat down. Michael's office, unlike that of our father, was as small and cramped as a closet, which I suspect it had been. His furniture might most charitably be described as second-hand. The

chair I sat in had long ago lost any luster in the varnish on the carved wood, but it was sturdy enough to hold me. I eased into it and gave Michael the low-down on what had happened.

"So," he said when I had finished, "Danny Boy wants me to intercede with the Egans, does he?"

"You've done it before," I said. "Even the papers say you've prevented a few gun battles by talking the boys into being sensible about something instead of shooting it out."

"I may have been of some help," he said with a dismissive tone. "But," he went on, "this is different. Whoever killed Hatty violated the protocol. Egan territory is supposed to be neutral right now. The Rats have the political connections the boys need to protect their bootleg interests and their gambling dens—about which you know nothing, I'm sure." That last came with a wicked grin. I arched my eyebrows and nodded in my best sardonic manner.

Michael went on. "It'll be more than the Egans after Danny, I'm betting. The Hogs, the Pillows, the Rusos, the Green Ones, even some of the Cuckoos could raise a rumpus."

I shook my head. "A priest knowing such things. What would the archbishop say?"

"My flock is varied," Michael said dryly.

"Also," he said, "Hatty helped this place out. He contributed generously, and I'd like his family to continue the tradition. I don't think they'd take kindly to my defending Rafferty or anyone else they thought gunned down the family patriarch."

I groaned. "Michael, have you become a politician?"

"Damned right," he replied cheerfully. "I couldn't keep this place open if I weren't."

A feeling of failure struck me like a sneak attack. Danny was hardly a bosom friend, but I felt as if I should ask Michael for penance to make up for a promise unfulfilled.

"Poor Hatty," Michael said. Then, with a little lift of his chin and a flicker of his eyes, he asked, "Did they get his hat? Did the bullets hit his homburg, I wonder?"

I said I didn't know, but the thought struck me, too. It somehow seemed a little sadder if Hatty's prized apparel had been destroyed along with him.

After I left Michael, my feeling of failure quickly lifted. I had done my part, after all. If the boys wanted to see me again, I was easy enough to find. It was time to get back to my own life.

That night I returned to Jazzland and found some new fish. Just before midnight I left, my coffers replenished. I caught the last Easton car going west, got off near the King's Highway and headed for my apartment, a little studio walkup on the northwest side.

My place was on the second floor. I had a rollaway bed, my own bathroom, and a really nice little kitchen that I never used. I went down the hall, unlocked the big wooden door, stepped inside, and turned on the light. My one and only easy chair, an overstuffed smoker, was sagging under the bulk of Phil Haines.

Perhaps I jumped less than a foot. I'm not sure. I let out a gasp, I know, which amused Phil. I do know that because he smiled—sort of. His lips parted, his teeth showed.

"I scare you, College Boy?"

I said nothing, didn't even bother to ask how he had gotten in. Among Phil's many accomplishments was burglary.

"You able to help Danny any?" he asked.

I closed my door and went the rest of the way into the room, took off my cap, and tossed it onto a table. Phil hadn't doffed his derby, and I think that I somehow hoped to intimidate him with the idea that by bar-

ing my head indoors I had superior manners.

"Very little, I'm afraid," I told him. "It seems my dad considered Finnegan a friend and my brother doesn't want to get mixed up in the whole mess, not this time around."

I faced him with my hands in my pockets so he couldn't see them trembling.

"There was one thing I learned," I said. "There was a witness..." and I told him what my father had told me about the colored janitor.

He listened with his head tilted to one side, his mouth in a tight sneer. "So what? Them people don't talk. That's one thing they're good for, keepin' quiet."

He stayed seated for another moment, then got up so fast I thought he was coming at me, on the attack, but he was just venting a little frustration.

"I gotta get Danny outa that hole," he said. "Between bein' stuck in there and takin' that hop, he's gonna be crazy. He never has been good at takin' care of business. He's a good egg, but he gets himself tangled up with women and the hooch too much, and now the hop. He oughtta take better care of business."

"You sound as if you're really worried," I said.

Phil merely grunted. He looked around, and I was seized with the thought that he was searching for something to take with him that would make his visit worthwhile.

"Maybe he's safer hiding out," I said. "Look at what happened to Hatty Finnegan when he went out of doors."

Phil snorted. He looked at me closely, then glanced furtively in several different directions. I don't know who he thought might overhear us.

"You hear what ol' man Finnegan did when he got plugged?" Phil asked. "Tried to keep his hat clean. Went crawlin' after his goddamn hat. Didn't try to get away from the shootin' or nothin', just tried to keep his goddam homburg clean. Ain't that a fine thing?"

"No kidding about the hat?" I said. "I hadn't known that."

"Was in the papers," Phil replied.

"Strange what a man's priorities are," I said.

"Yeah."

"It's really good of you," I said, "to look out for Danny like this. Most of the birds I know would shed somebody in his fix, let him sweat it out on his own."

He looked at me hard, with the old arctic sheen on the blue eyes. I shivered, but only slightly. Phil didn't notice.

Without any further word, he left.

"So long, Phil," I said, but he was through the door, without shutting it, and on his way down the hall already. I heard his footsteps on the stairs as I closed the door and leaned against it and thought.

The next night I went to the Jazzland Club more to hear the noise and feel the push and press of the people than to try to hook any fish. There was a colored trio I liked playing jazz, and I thought it might be nice to dance if I could find a willing partner. I usually could. I wasn't a bad stepper back then.

When I went in the door, the bartender, his name was Cully, motioned me toward the back room. I had known him long enough that there was no mistaking the signal. Somebody wanted to talk to me. I knew it would be Phil Haines, and I did not relish the prospect.

But I was wrong. It was Danny Rafferty.

He sat at an old card table in a space surrounded by crates of supplies for the club. Against one wall was a sink with a mirror over it. A bare bulb hanging from a frayed cord provided the only light, which was merciless on Rafferty. His skin was pallid, his beard was getting heavy, and his dark eyes had a hopped glaze that glowed even

in the dim light. He had picked up the automatic when I entered the room. Now he set it down on the table, close to his hand.

"You know where Phil is?" he asked.

"No idea."

"Son of a bitch," he said fiercely, but with the rasp of tears in his words. He hit the table as he spoke. His moving around stirred the still air. He hadn't bathed in a while. I could smell him.

"When did you see him last?" I asked, and regretted it. I didn't want to know.

"Yesterday afternoon. He said he was comin' back that night. He said he was comin' back."

"Take it easy, Danny," I said.

"Goddammit, I need him. If I'm ever gonna get out of this fix, I gotta have Phil to help me."

"Yeah," I said, "like he helped get you into it."

He looked up at me, and I felt like pulling my cap down over my head. As it was, I just looked away.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he demanded.

"Nothing. I was just talking through my hat."

"No, you wasn't. You don't never say nothin' that doesn't mean something," he said angrily. "Now what was it?" He

stood and picked up the automatic and pointed it at me at arm's length. "Tell me," he said.

I swallowed hard, but not, I think, audibly.

"Phil Haines bumped off Hatty Finnegan," I said.

His lower lip dropped, and his mouth was a gaping hole, as dark and sinister as the opening at the end of the pistol barrel. Then he laughed, laughed hard and sat down and put down the automatic.

"You're nutty, Fogarty," he said.

"Yeah, probably, but I'm also right about Phil."

"Phil wouldn't kill nobody I didn't tell him to. He knew I wanted Hatty alive. All of us did."

"Last night Phil told me how Hatty died," and I told him about the old boy's effort to save his hat.

"So what," Danny said, and sputtered a scornful laugh through closed lips. "He read it in the papers."

"That's what he told me," I replied, "but he didn't. I went to the public library today, read all the papers, all editions since Hatty got bumped off. None of them mentions the hat. Did you know it, that he died trying to keep his hat clean?"

He looked away from me, his brow creased into furrows, and

he seemed to study the labels on the crates.

"No," he said, "I didn't."

"After I got through at the library," I said, "I took a friend to lunch. A secretary over at police headquarters. She got a look at the police report and the eyewitness statement. She asked me how I knew about the hat. I think maybe she suspects me of killing Hatty now."

Danny started to say something, but I had the floor and I held onto it.

"My friend never talks, it would mean her job. And the homicide dicks don't talk, and the eyewitness wouldn't talk because he's colored and he'd be scared to death. So that just leaves Phil."

Danny looked up at me. His face was a boy's.

"Why would Phil do it?"

I shrugged. "Who knows? He knew you hated Finnegan. Maybe it was a favor to you."

"He knew I wanted Finnegan alive. For now."

"Maybe he wanted a fight, then," I said.

Danny stood up suddenly. The wooden chair he had been sitting on fell backward with a clatter on the cement floor.

"He'll have one now," Danny said. "I'll kill the son of a bitch."

He looked around the room rather wildly for a moment,

tugged at the lapels of his coat, adjusted his hat, and went quickly to the mirror. He began to adjust his tie.

"You know," I said, "I think maybe Phil just wanted to help you out in his own way. He didn't think you were paying enough attention to business and . . ."

Even though Danny turned toward me, he wasn't really listening. He grinned—a terrible sick face it was that I saw, his eyes beaming an unholy wedlock of hate and joy.

"Yeah, Terry," he said, and in spite of myself I felt pleased to hear him use my first name. "Thanks a lot. Thanks. When I'm back on my feet, partner, and I got a little extra cash, I won't forget this." He came over and slapped my shoulder. "Soon as I bump off that son of a bitch. When I explain to some of the boys what happened, I'm the bees' knees for sure."

He returned to the mirror, primping himself for the slaughter that lay ahead.

I went to the door, had my hand on the handle, but stopped.

"Danny," I said, "you can do me a favor. Anybody asks how you doped this out, don't men-

tion me. Just tell them you did it yourself."

"Yeah, yeah, sure," he replied, but he was too preoccupied with his appearance to really pay attention. I left in a hurry.

Phil's body was found the next morning along the river bank near the colored shantytown. I expect he was killed on his way back to see Danny. Danny was cut down a day or two later outside his still, which was at an isolated house in the rural part of the county. If Danny told anyone what I had figured out, it hadn't mattered.

Neither man was as important as Hatty, but gang slayings were hot news in those days, and the rags ran a lot of type on the theory that all three were "related."

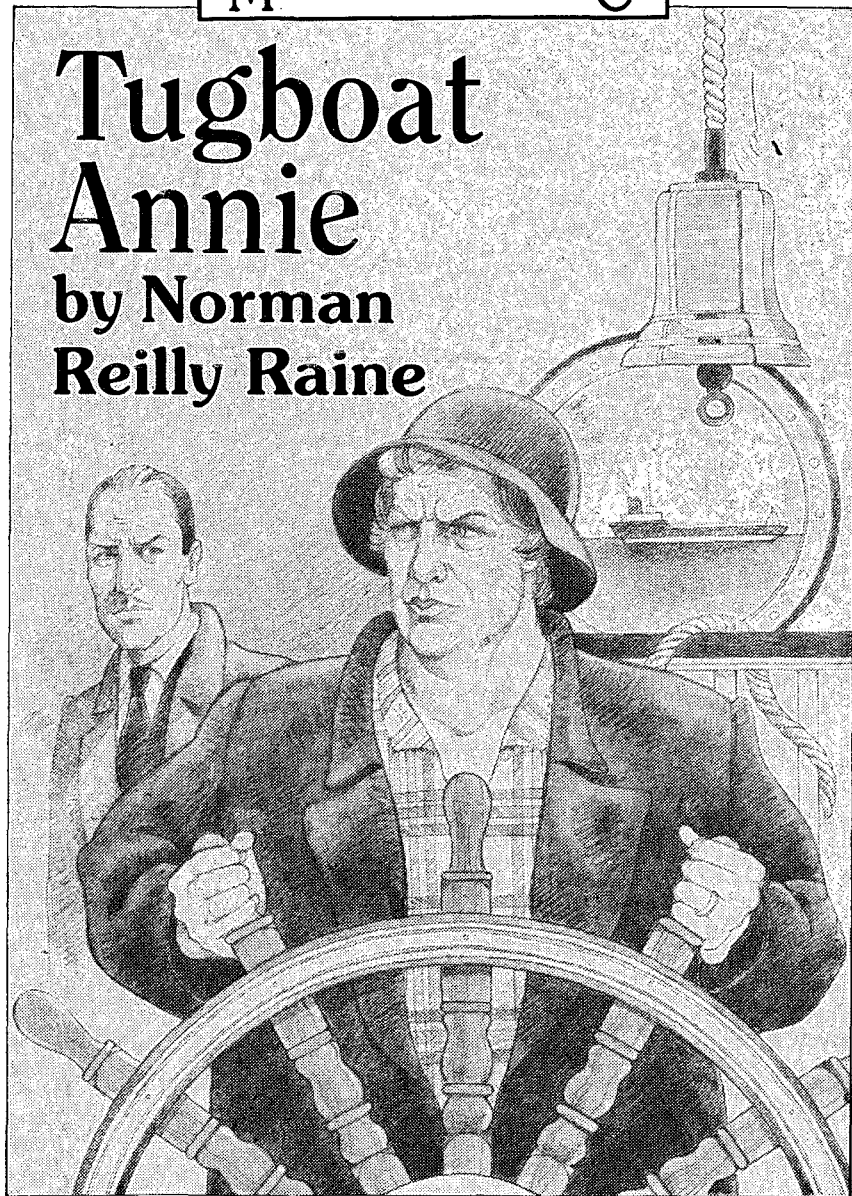
My part in it never came to light, which was fine with me. But from time to time I thought about Danny and Phil. Of all the boys who died that way in those days—and I knew a few of them—they were the only ones who ever asked my help. So I remember them, all these years later, a couple of yeggs, like so many others, that nobody could save.



MYSTERY CLASSIC

# Tugboat Annie

by Norman  
Reilly Raine



*Illustration by George Thompson*

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“I’m fired? Who says I’m fired?” Tugboat Annie Brennan leaned across the desk of the president of the Deep-Sea Towing and Salvage Company, and thrust her formidable jowls into his red, embarrassed face. She repeated, with husky emphasis: “Who says so?”

“Now, Annie! Please—”

“Don’t you ‘Now, Annie’ me, Alec Severn! And answer my question!”

“Why—” Mr. Severn coughed, and mopped his perspiring brow. “Well—hrrmph! It’s Mr. Conroy. The business needs money, and he’s putting it in—a lot of it. Enough to buy that new tugboat we want so badly. He’s an absolute godsend. But he’s got ideas—about women, I mean.”

“Huh! What man hasn’t? And what is these fool ideas?”

“Well, he—he thinks that managing a towing and salvage company is a man’s job. He has the notion that women lack the—well, intelligence was the word he used—to handle the active side of the business. Says men won’t do their maximum of efficient work under a woman chief. They resent her.”

Tugboat Annie snorted, “I’d like to see any o’ the boys on the *Narcissus* resent me. I’d heave ‘em—”

“I know—I know! But Mr. Conroy doesn’t understand. You and I belong to the old school, Annie, and our ways don’t seem to fit these days somehow. Mr. Conroy, now, he’s modern. He’s efficient and understands modern business methods.” He hesitated and lowered his voice: “Tell you the truth, Annie, I don’t just fancy the man. There’s something about him—cold. If there was any other way of getting the money, I’d see him in—I mean, I wouldn’t have him! But there isn’t. And he thinks that—Wait a minute. Here he comes up the stairs. He can tell you himself—thank the Lord!” he concluded.

Tugboat Annie drew herself up and glared, first out the window, at the crowded shipping of the harbor and the busy wharves, and then at the office door. She was large-framed, solidly built, with rugged, almost masculine features and shrewd, quick blue eyes, and her movements had an elephantine energy that galvanized everyone with whom she came in contact. When she passed through a room, dust and odd bits of paper danced in her wake. And when she stood, as now, with beetling brows and sturdy legs apart, the feather in her antiquated bonnet nodding raffish defi-

ance, she looked not unlike a blowzy but exceedingly combative bulldog.

The door opened and Severn held his breath. Mr. Conroy entered, a businessman from his crisp, graying hair, precisely parted, to his efficiently polished English oxfords. Mr. Conroy liked to convey the impression of a micrometrically functioning, hard-glazed piece of steel mechanism, and his impersonation was highly successful.

"Morning, Severn," he said crisply, but Tugboat Annie heaved herself forward.

"Say!" she demanded. "Are you the lallapaloosa that says I'm fired?"

Mr. Conroy drew back, hastily adjusting his glasses. "Why, I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Neither do I. Neither does Alec. So who does?"

Severn said, placatingly, "This is Mrs. Brennan, Mr. Conroy. You remember we discussed her—"

"Tugboat Annie Brennan! That's what the waterfront calls me. And I didn't get the name pushin' toy boats around the bathtub, either! Now, what you firin' me for?"

Severn interposed again: "You see, Conroy, Mrs. Brennan's husband Terry was senior captain of the company for a good many years. He was a good tugboat man, but—"

"Terry was a drunken sot. But he was the best husband a woman ever had, Lord rest his soul! And in between his rasslin' bouts with old John—"

"John?" said Conroy, with raised eyebrows.

"Barleycorn!" said Tugboat Annie briefly. "In between bouts I ran his job for him. A year ago he died o'—"

"Syncope," Severn hastily interpolated.

"Water poisonin'!" Tugboat Annie corrected grimly. "Drank a glass o' water, thinkin' it was gin, and his stomach couldn't stand the shock. Alec let me stay in his place, and I done a good job of it, too. Ain't I, Alec?"

"Yes, you have, Annie," Severn assented. "Mrs. Brennan knows her work and this coast, Conroy, as few men do. She's been at it for twenty years or more, and I've full confidence in her. Don't you think—"

During the recital Conroy's thin lips had tightened to an obdurate line.

"The opinion I expressed to you yesterday, Severn, has not altered. It has been strengthened. To be quite frank, Mrs.—er—Bren-

nan does not impress me. She is too—shall we say, informal? I propose, if I enter this company, to make it the strongest on the seaboard, and the position of senior captain will be one of responsibility, dignity. No doubt she knows something about the work. But she is a woman, and—in this business particularly—that is not a good thing.”

Tugboat Annie choked, was ready with a stormy interruption, but Conroy held up a peremptory hand.

“Her influence, in what essentially is a man’s sphere, is bound to have undesirable results. I think I can see it, even now, in small things. The names of your present vessels, for instance.”

“I named them tugs! What’s the matter with ’em?” Annie demanded furiously.

Conroy shrugged. “Tugs connote strength; rude but efficient power. And instead of calling them appropriate names, such as, say, Trojan, Titan, Atlas, Hercules, they are called—” he smiled acridly “—Daffodil, Asphodel, Pansy, and Narcissus.”

“What of it? Can’t a person like posies?”

“May I remind you that I am not deaf?”

“Mebbe you’re not, but you’re awful dumb! Here I’ve give twenty years of my life to the company, and you come along and I’m throwed out like an old sweat rag. Didn’t it ever occur to you, Mr. Conman, or whatever your name is, that loyalty and hard work’s worth something to business, as well as a lot o’ fancy names? Huh? . . . Oh well! What’s the good o’ spinnin’ me jaw? When do I go, Alec?”

Conroy said magnanimously: “I have no objection to your carrying on until we get a man to fill the place, Mrs. Brennan.”

“You have no objection, ye cold blooded haddock! What have you got to say about it? You ain’t even in the company yet. I’ll take my sailin’ orders from Alec here, if he ain’t lost his tongue.”

“Go back to the *Narcissus*, Annie,” said Severn unhappily. “I’ll let you know. I’m sorry—”

Conroy moved apprehensively aside as Tugboat Annie barged toward him, but she passed without a word and went down the stairs to the bright, dust-hazed sunlight of the busy waterfront street. Trucks rumbled and bumped over the pavement, motor traffic roared past, a long line of boxcars was shunted by, and from the harbor beyond the sheds came a sonorous chorus of whistles—tugs, liners, and deep-water tramps. Blind and deaf to it all, her hat feather bobbing deliriously, she fussed through the traffic and was

nearly run down by a three-horse dray. She looked up at the grinning driver and stopped, inclined for battle.

"Don't ye know the rules o' the road, ye cock-eyed baboon?" she roared.

Crossing the railroad tracks, she got one shoe half full of gravel, which did not improve her temper. She limped painfully out on the long, dingy wharf alongside which were berthed the tugs of the Deep-Sea Towing and Salvage Company, and, part way, stopped to remove the gravel from her shoe. She shook the shoe irascibly, and it flew from her grasp and disappeared with a splash into the dock. Tugboat Annie watched it sink, her lips moving wordlessly, then limped on her stockinged foot, great toe protruding, the length of the wharf.

The *Narcissus*, biggest of the fleet, was moored at the end; and when she saw the familiar, powerful snub bow with its great collision mat of woven hemp, bleached by hard service in sun and rain and salt water, the glass enclosed pilot house, the heavy towing bitts on the fantail, and the grimy red and white and black of the house, she forgot for a moment that it was no longer her home.

"Ain't she the dirty old tramp?" she muttered proudly to herself. "Got to get a new sta'board fender, though."

She stepped heavily from the stringpiece to the narrow deck, and crossed through, over the engine room grating, to the port side. A gangling man in stained dungarees, with a prominent Adam's apple, a stubble of beard, and amiable, washed-out eyes, was seated on the pilot house steps, his neglected paint pot beside him, while he sucked on a cigarette. He looked up at her approach, flung the butt hastily over the side, and commenced furiously to slap paint on the house. Tugboat Annie bellowed at him:

"Shiftless, you been poundin' your ear all mornin' while I been ashore? Ye have, ye lazy numskull! Look at that house! Hardly a dab on it! Come here!"

With an uncertain grin, Shiftless approached, an elbow raised to protect his ear. "Aw, now, Annie—" he protested.

She gave him a hearty cuff. "You been drinkin' some o' Rosinski's snake blood again, too, ye worthless hound! You lemme sniff that stuff on ye again and I'll skin ye alive. D'ye hear?"

"Yes, Annie."

"Don't forget it! Where's Sam—in the engine room?"

"Yes'm."

"Go below, then, and tell him I want a complete list of engine room stores by six o'clock tonight. And stop in the galley and tell Pinto I want a list o' grub on hand from him." She noticed his startled stare. "What's the matter—you paralyzed? . . . Well, go on, then! Move!"

She watched, grimly, as he dropped his brush and ran. "They won't say I didn't turn the old hooker over to 'em shipshape," she grunted. "Frozen-faced old sculpin!"

She went into her cabin and flung her bonnet, with its agitated feather, on the settee. Then she commenced to change, her gaze roving around the familiar, cluttered room that had been her only home for so many years. Her glance rested finally, after purposely avoiding it, upon a large tinted chromo of the late Captain Brennan, in a plush and gold oval frame. The departed's face was round and beefily good-natured, with a half grin under the large black bartender's mustache, a lock of glossy hair plastered down his forehead, and the humorous, dark eyes of Erin.

Tugboat Annie stood motionless, regarding it. "You certainly was a soak, Terry," she muttered huskily, "but—oh, go on, you big louse! What are ye starin' at?" She turned the picture to the wall and rubbed her nose hard with her knuckles. "Sentimental old fool I'm growin' to be! Where the devil'd I put me other shoe?"

They were at supper—the small ship's company of the *Narcissus*, with Pinto, the cook—when the telephone on the wharf rang sharply. It was for Tugboat Annie. She lumbered out onto the quay, her capacious mouth full of steak and potatoes, and with a slice of bread and butter in her fist.

"Hello," she said, gulping hastily. "Wha'—what's that? . . . A ship ashore? Where? . . . All right, Alec, I'll take the *Pansy* along, too, huh? . . . What's that? Conroy coming? . . . No—no! I wasn't swearin'—Just swallerin' me supper. Tell him to shake a leg, then. If he shakes it hard enough, mebbe it'll break. Wants to l'arn something about the work, huh? Hmmp! . . . All right, Alec. Same to you, wi' knobs on it, you old fafozeler!"

She daddled hastily back to the *Narcissus*, cramming her face with bread and butter as she went, and burst into the tiny saloon.

"Git below, Sam, and you, too, Shiftless. One of you other boys stand by to cast off. And somebody tell Pinto to keep the supper warm."

"What's all the excitement, Annie?" asked Sam, a slow-speaking, slow-moving mountain of mechanical competency.

"There's a ship—the *Barracuda*—beached and on fire in Juan de Fuca Strait, near Neah Bay. You know her—the one that runs to California and Mexican ports, with old Skinflint Crabtree in command. Look alive, now! The Puget Sound Towing Company'll be sending a tug; so will the Secoma Salvage crowd; so it'll be a race. Oh, cuss it!" She stopped suddenly. "We've got to wait for a passenger. Feller called Conroy, who's goin' to be Severn's partner in the company. Well, go on, all of you; don't stand there goggle-eyed! Alec can have a partner if he wants, I guess!"

She went to the pilot house and looked out the door. Conroy was proceeding sedately along the wharf. Tugboat Annie bawled:

"Get a move on, queer feller! A person'd think ye was walkin' on flypaper!"

He came to the rail, jumped down. "What's the hurry?" he inquired crisply. "Don't you know that haste breeds inefficiency?"

"So does a litter o' feathered pigs! . . . All right, Henry; cast off!"

Tugboat Annie spun the wheel over. The engine room signal jingled and the *Narcissus* drew away from the wharf and piled up a big bow wave as she headed up Puget Sound. The fresh breeze of the afternoon had dropped, and the night was calm and almost sultry; and as darkness came and Secoma fell astern, the lights of the towns scattered along the sound danced with jeweled brilliance over the water that spread like a sheet of rippling orchid silk to the far, island-dotted shore. Two hundred yards astern, the riding lights of the *Pansy* glowed, ruby and emerald and topaz, in the velvet dusk.

For a time Tugboat Annie steered in silence, with Conroy standing on the deck outside the pilot house. Suddenly she addressed him:

"You had your supper yet?"

"No"—testily.

"Ain't that just too bad?" Tugboat Annie gave her attention to her steering. Then she shook herself in a burst of exasperation and ripped out: "Darn me, anyway! . . . I never give meself no peace! Go on along to the cabin, then! The boys'll be finishin' their supper presently, and I'll have Pinto set a place for ye."

Conroy eyed her coldly. "You mean I'm to eat with the crew?"

"Why not?" Tugboat Annie snapped. "It won't poison 'em, mebbe."

"I'll have mine alone," Conroy said firmly. "I'm practically a member of the firm now, you know. Mr. Severn and I came to an agreement this afternoon."

"That was clever of Alec," Tugboat Annie grunted.

"What was?"

"Comin' to an agreement wi' you." She put her head out the door.

"Pinto! Pinto!"

A voice hailed back, "Yaas, ma'am?"

"Set a place for the queer feller in the cabin. If he don't come for it, he don't eat."

"Yaas, ma'am!"

Conroy was no fool. He went aft to his meal.

The night passed, and at daybreak Tugboat Annie was again at the wheel, relieving the yawning mate. The *Narcissus* was forging steadily through the wind-ruffled blueness of Juan de Fuca Strait, with the snowy peaks of the Olympic Peninsula far off to port, making a glory of the morning sky. The *Pansy* was a mile astern; and to starboard, one slightly ahead, the other abeam, were the big wrecking tugs of the rival companies. Conroy, who had been forced to sleep on the pilot house settee, was also up and about, stretching his limbs after an uncomfortable night.

He stood on the sloping forward deck of the *Narcissus*, drinking in the sharp, salt-laden air, when Tugboat Annie hailed him.

"Ye came aboard to l'arn things, didn't ye, mister?"

"To observe things, Mrs. Brennan."

"Aye? Well, there's Lesson No. 1 in the tugboat business, or any other kind o' business."

"What is that?"

"Not to let your competitors beat ye to a job," she elaborated. "See them tugs over there? One's the *Firefly* and the other's the *General Mason*, both belongin' to rival companies. And see that point o' land ahead? That's Cape Flattery. That's where the *Barra-cuda*'s piled up. Look at them tugs pushin' the water away. Whoops! Go along and tell Sam to make her give everything she's got!"

Caught against his will in the current of rivalry, Conroy obeyed. Black smoke poured from the *Narcissus*'s funnel crown, and there was a slight access of speed. But the competing tugs also cracked on their ultimate ounce of pressure, and the positions of the three remained unchanged. The nearest tug—the *Firefly*—edged close, and a red-whiskered giant in her pilot house leaned out.

"Hey there, Annie!" he bawled. "What'll ye give me to go home?"

"Hello, Red!" Tugboat Annie boomed. "I'll tell your wife where I seen ye night afore last, if ye don't. Go on now; beat it, afore that



face o' yours turns me breakfast!"

Red Whiskers chortled delightedly. They exchanged further rough persiflage, in which Tugboat Annie more than held her own, and he sheered away.

They surged around the point almost abreast, and their quarry lay before them; a big five thousand ton steamer, with rusty, red lead patched hull, dun-colored houses, and an orange funnel. She was lying with a slight list to starboard, her forefoot on a shelving rock and her stern afloat in deep water. Some distance off her stern the flooding tide boiled and receded over the hidden reefs through which she had made her course the previous day. A pale streamer of smoke still spiraled upward in the quiet air from one of the forward holds. Simultaneously the racing tugs whistled, and figures waved in response from the stranded vessel's deck.

Tugboat Annie signaled the engine room, and the *Narcissus* threaded skillfully through the reefs and came to rest in the clear water almost under the vessel's stern, with the words on her counter—*Barracuda*, San Pedro—looming above. A short distance off, the other tugs rounded to, rolling lazily in the long swell.

There was confused shouting on the *Barracuda's* deck, and a seaman ran aft and leaned over the poop rail. He addressed the *Narcissus*: "Captain Crabtree says, will you come abreast o' the gangway? There's clear water there."

Tugboat Annie looked faintly puzzled. Then she set her massive jaw, and calling Henry to the wheel, walked casually along the port side to the fantail, inspecting the stranded tramp's position. She halted and looked over the side for a moment, as though gauging the depth of water and the position of the rocks under the steamer's stern; then returned to the pilot house. The *Narcissus* sloshed around and nosed into line with the other two, abreast of the partly lowered gangway.

A thin, walnut-faced man with prim lips and a small nose, slightly drooping at the end, stood in the waist at the head of the gangway. His calculating eyes surveyed the three tugs, waiting on the other side of the reef like dogs about to scramble for a bone, with the *Pansy* coming rapidly up astern. He raised a megaphone and shouted, with a slightly nasal twang:

"This is just a towing job, boys, for we'll float off at high tide, or kedge off; and we can proceed ourselves in a pinch. But we've a list, and water in No. 1 Hold, and our steering gear's jammed through runnin' in here among the rocks. So I'd ruther be towed

in. Now, what's your price to Secoma?"

Conroy turned impatiently to Tugboat Annie. "Get a bid in quick."

Tugboat Annie croaked: "Quit your brayin' and shut up! I'll handle this!"

"By the way," resumed the *Barracuda's* master, "you boats all belong to the same company?"

"Yes!" shouted the red-whiskered one.

"No!" replied the master of the *General Mason*.

Tugboat Annie did not speak.

"The 'no's' have it," shouted Captain Crabtree with a sly grin. "So ye'll have to bid for it."

Red Whiskers exchanged a few lurid compliments with his rival, and it was a minute or two before they got back to business.

"Come on, boys! We haven't got all week!" the *Barracuda's* master reminded them. "What's your price?"

"Six hundred dollars, includin' haulin' you off the rocks!" bel-  
lowed Red.

"Five hundred and fifty!" countered the *General Mason*.

"Why the deuce don't you say something?" Conroy demanded angrily of Tugboat Annie.

"Will you close your jaw, horseface?" Annie demanded. She stuck her massive head, adorned with a disreputable felt hat of the late Captain Brennan, out of the door and stared up at the master of the *Barracuda*.

"What about you?" he called. "You goin' to quote me foolish prices too?"

"What's your cargo?" she bellowed.

Captain Crabtree appeared to hesitate. He said reluctantly: "Fish oils, turpentine, paint—"

"—alcohol, glycerin, and tar paper!" she finished for him. "From San Francisco, for Secoma. I know the stuff you generally carry." She left the pilot house and lumbered out on deck.

The master of the *Barracuda* registered astonishment, "Sa-ay, you're a woman!"

"They ain't no law against that!" Tugboat Annie shot back. "What did ye think I was—a giraffe?"

"But it's kind of unusual—"

"So's elephant's eggs! . . . Come on, Crabtree; get down to business! A ship on fire and an inflammable cargo—my price is eight hundred dollars!"

"So's mine!" the competing captains amended hastily.

"You're a bunch o' pirates!" Crabtree yelled wrathfully. "The usual price is about three hundred dollars. Ye'll have to bring that bid down."

"You're a skinflint," Tugboat Annie informed him, "but I'm bringin' it down. Seven hundred and fifty."

"Seven twenty-five!" shouted the *General Mason*.

"Seven hundred!" Red countered.

"Six hundred and seventy-five!"

"Six hundred and fifty!" Tugboat Annie bawled. "I got two tugs—that little *Pansy* there, and this one. Two tugs to haul ye off and into Secoma for only six fifty! And I'll stand ye a gallon o' beer when we git in!"

"Six hundred flat!" howled the *General Mason's* skipper. "Cuss you, Annie! You tryin' to ruin the job?"

For half an hour the battle raged. The *General Mason* dropped out at five hundred, and her disgruntled master stood off and listened. "You're a fool, Red," he volunteered bitterly, "lettin' Annie suck ye into this! Can't you see she's gone off her nut?"

But the *Firefly's* master was of tougher metal, and the price was hammered down to three hundred and fifty dollars. And there, face and whiskers flaming, and streaming with sweat, he stuck.

"That's my final word, and not a cent less. It ain't worth it." He was dancing with disappointed chagrin. "I wouldn't have run the price that far down, Annie, only ye got me so mad—"

"Take a runnin' jump over the side afore ye catch afire, Red!" she counseled. She looked up at Crabtree, hugely enjoying himself at the head of his vessel's gangway.

"You're sure the fire's under? And what other damage is there beyond the jammed steerin' gear and water in the hold?"

"That's all, missus. Come on; beat the captain's bid! It'll be a bargain for you at three hundred."

Tugboat Annie seemed perplexed, unsure of herself. Her brow was corrugated, her large mouth set in a grim line. She rubbed her nose with her knuckles, then turned abruptly to Conroy.

"Well, fish ears, what would you say?"

Conroy had lost his cool self-possession. He was white with temper.

"Say? I'd say you're the world's colossal ass, woman! You heard what those two captains said, didn't you? You get yourself in a jam, then have to have a man to solve your problem for you. That's

woman's business efficiency! If you take that job on now, I stay out of the company!"

Tugboat Annie looked up at the grinning master of the *Barracuda*. "Three hundred it is, captain!" she said promptly. "We'll stand by to take your line and drag you off."

But Captain Crabtree shook his head. "Oh, no. You're doing the towing, so we'll use your line. And if our steerin' gear's repaired before we get in, I won't need your small tug; so I want a deduction of thirty percent per land mile off the towin' price from the point of repair to Secoma."

"You see? You're properly hooked!" Conroy snarled. "Probably there's nothing much wrong with his steering gear. He'll have it fixed by the time you get under way, and with thirty percent off, you'll have to tow him to Secoma for two hundred and ten dollars! Hah! Woman's clear brain! Woman's business intuition!"

"Let's get going!" Captain Crabtree hailed. "What do you say, there, missus?"

The *Firefly* surged past, close to the *Narcissus's* bulwark, with only the lift of a sea between, and her bewhiskered master called across:

"Tell him to go to hell, Annie! I sure would hate to see you stuck like this. We'll all go home and leave him there to rot!"

"You go play Parcheesi wi' your grandma, Red. I know what I'm doing!" But Tugboat Annie's rugged face was grim as she again turned to the *Barracuda*. "There's weather comin' up; so when we get ye off and it comes on to blow, use your own power to ease the strain off the towline."

"What? Use my own coal when I'm paying you to tow me? Ha-ha-ha! Not a chance!"

"All right, Captain Shylock!" Tugboat Annie shouted in a sudden rage. "Have it all your own way!"

The wind was blowing along the strait. With the flood tide and the terrific hauling strength of the *Narcissus* and the *Pansy*, the *Barracuda* slowly was snaked off the rock shelf, through the reef, and into deep water beyond. She was down by the head, with the water in the forward hold, but not seriously so. It was nearing dark, with an overcast sky, and sudden squalls spattered the deck with rain. The *Narcissus* took up the pull of the heavy hawser; the *Pansy*, with a line aboard, did her bit; and the *Barracuda* began slowly to forge ahead.

Tugboat Annie stood at the wheel with a huge bean sandwich in one fist and a blue granite mug of steaming coffee nearby, dividing her time between eating, steering, and watching speculatively the head of Conroy, who stood on the forward deck, his hostile face turned toward the stormy waters of the strait ahead. She hailed him:

"Foul-weather Jack's abroad, so if ye like fresh air, ye'll get plenty before the night's out."

He rounded on her, his eyes hard as flint through his glasses, his clothes wrinkled and spattered with salt spray. But before he could deliver the spiteful comment that rose to his lips, one of the deck hands appeared in the pilot house.

He said, "Annie, Sam sent me to tell you that Shiftless is drunk as a fiddler's dog. He can't go on watch."

"What's that?" Tugboat Annie roared. "Here! Take the wheel. . . . Look out, ye clumsy ox! . . . There now. Keep her as she is."

She lumbered hastily aft and disappeared down the engine room housing. For a few minutes there was the sound of a minor hurricane below, dominated by her vigorous bellow. She reappeared, breathless and disheveled, followed by the oil-grimed figure of Sam, the engineer.

"That'll l'arn him, eh?" she threw over her shoulder. The big man grinned.

Conroy turned on her.

"Another sample of feminine muddle-headedness, eh, Mrs. Brennan?" he snapped sarcastically. "No extra fireman. Do you know what you're going to do now?"

"Yes," she wheezed, "I know. It's one problem you're going to answer for me."

"Don't be humorous," he told her shortly, but the expression on her face, heavy and lowering, like an angry mastiff, was anything but that. She balanced easily on the heaving deck and spoke, her voice strident over the rising wind:

"Mebbe you'll think it's funny! But I've something to say to you. The other day ye had me fired, ye cold blooded squid! Why? Because I was a woman! Then ye came aboard here to snoop; get something on me to feed your mean little ideas about women who do a man's job for a livin', huh? Wanted to see how a fool woman did things. Well, you're goin' to find out. I was kind o' hopin' that mebbe ye'd forget yourself and get a little human, but I see it ain't in ye. But ye've the outward carcass of a man, and I'm goin' to put it to work."

"What do you mean?" Alarmed, Conroy stepped back before her menacing advance.

"Mean?" she erupted. "I'm goin' to let ye practice some of that efficiency you're always gassin' about. A bent tool is better than none—so get ye below to the stokehold. You're goin' to spell the other fireman and help keep the steam pressure up till we git in. It'll mebbe sweat some of the conceit out of ye; and even if it don't, ye'll have something to remember Tugboat Annie by!"

Conroy felt the wind in his hot face, looked out at the driving whitecaps overside.

"Don't be ridiculous! I'm practically part owner—"

"You're part owner of a coal scoop from now on. . . . Sam—"

The big engineer brought his hulking frame into the foreground and jerked his thumb.

"That way," he growled.

Conroy clung to the rail, half crying with humiliation, but Sam grasped him from behind with sinewy hands and frog-marched him along the narrow deck. They disappeared into the housing. There was a clatter, a couple of sharp smacks, and a cry abruptly silenced.

"And that," mused Tugboat Annie in her cabin sometime later, to the appreciative chromo of the late Captain Brennan, "was that!"

Shortly after dark, with a half gale blowing, and the seas, white-crested and angry, catapulting past the rail, the lights of a moving vessel, yawing and dipping, came swiftly up from astern and swung as close to the *Narcissus* as safety would permit. It was the *Pansy*. Her master megaphoned across:

"The *Barracuda's* got her steering gear repaired and Crabtree cut us adrift. That's something off his towing bill."

"The dirty old curmudgeon," Tugboat Annie growled. She shouted back: "All right! Don't worry! Just stand by in case we need you!"

Shortly after midnight the towline parted with a crack, and the *Narcissus* lurched away on the crest of a sea. She picked up the *Barracuda's* lights, but in a darkness intensified by driving rain squalls, and battered by wildly mounting seas, it was impossible to get another line aboard, and an anxious vigil ensued which lasted until daybreak. Dawn spread over a green and tumbling waste, and the *Barracuda*, drifting with wind and current, and with the seas spouting up her rusty side, was rounded up. It was nearly noon, however, before Tugboat Annie's superb seamanship

was effective and a line again was taken on board.

Red-eyed with lack of sleep, but indomitable, she stood at the wheel as the slow, heartbreaking voyage was resumed, gauging each charging comber, easing off, bringing up the head, inching down the coast that was almost obscured by driving spindrift. Conroy, who had come off watch, stood in the lee of the house, dividing his attention between cruelly blistered palms and the smoking combers that thundered up from astern, swooped under the fantail, and roared away into the maelstrom ahead. He was quiet now, outwardly subdued, but he had watched with angry concentration the battle to pick up the drifting *Barracuda*, and he promised himself his full innings when and if the voyage was done. Once he ventured near the wheelhouse, like a scorched moth which cannot resist the flame.

"What if the *Barracuda* breaks adrift again and piles up on the beach?" he said in surly tones.

Tugboat Annie did not turn her head. "If that happens, queer feller," she rasped, "you'd better say your prayers, if ye know any, for I'll go after her. I'm goin' to get that vessel to port if I have to chase her ashore and put wheels under her. Now get away from the pilot house before I forget I'm a lady."

The gale had blown itself out by dark, and although the seas still were menacing, Tugboat Annie's expert knowledge of Puget Sound waters enabled her to take the leeward of every available point of land. The sky had cleared, and the light-spangled hills of Secoma blazed like a heavenly galaxy ahead. Slowly they moved up the harbor to a vacant berth, and the *Barracuda* was made fast.

Tugboat Annie, coming from the pilot house to the deck, encountered Conroy as he emerged from the engine room.

"I'm going ashore now—" he began, but Tugboat Annie's rough croak interrupted him:

"And who cares? I hope ye've l'arned something of a woman's ways on a deep-water tug. Goodnight and bad luck!"

She turned in to her bunk as she was. But at nine o'clock the next morning, with her feathered shore-going bonnet perched defiantly on her tousled head, she sat in her cabin awaiting the arrival of Alec Severn and Captain Crabtree. Severn arrived first. His red face was depressed and unhappy.

"Hello, Annie," he said tonelessly.

"Hello, Alec. What are you looking so glum about?" she rumbled. "It'd give a body the bellyache to look at ye."



For a moment he did not answer. Then he looked up and met her bovine gaze.

"I fought your battle for you with Conroy all the rest of that day, Annie. And I told him, finally, that rather than let you go I'd see him and his money some other place. Then he came around a bit, for he's really keen about taking over the company. And he's got a reputation—"

"Hmmp! What kind? There's several, ye know!"

"It's the right business kind, it happens. Finally I persuaded him to go out with the *Narcissus* that night and see for himself how efficiently you really could handle a difficult job. . . . Well, no use going into the horrible mess you made of it. He telephoned me last night after you got in."

"He would," Tugboat Annie rasped, but Severn continued without heeding her:

"The job was worth five hundred dollars at the least, considering we had two tugs and had to pull him off the rocks and all. But you let your stubborn dislike of Conroy override the interests of the company, and you got well hooked by the *Barracuda's* master as a result. What got into you, Annie? You never let me down before!"

"It must be the tie ye're wearin', Alec," said Tugboat Annie. "It's kind of a bilious color. Is Sweet Forget-Me-Not comin' along here this mornin'?"

"Yes, he's due any time now—him and the master of the *Baracuda*."

The two men arrived together—Conroy again the cold, immaculate machine, and Captain Crabtree looking, in his shore-going clothes, like an apple that had hung too long on the tree. Conroy bowed stiffly to Severn, ignored Tugboat Annie.

"Had your lemon juice this morning?" she asked solicitously.

Severn motioned her to silence. He came abruptly to the point:

"Don't you think, Captain Crabtree, that in consideration of what the *Narcissus* pulled you through last night, it only would be fair if you paid the full towing fee of three hundred dollars, as originally agreed?"

"No, I don't," said Captain Crabtree with a grin.

"But you might have lost your ship."

"'Might' is a chancy word, sir. And an agreement's an agreement. I can't afford to be kind-hearted. With the thirty per cent reduction which became effective when we repaired our steer-

ing-gear breakdown, I figger I owe you two hundred and forty dollars."

"No, ye don't," grunted Tugboat Annie.

"Don't what?"

"Ye don't owe us one cent on the agreement we made."

Captain Crabtree stared at her with gratified surprise. "Well, that's very nice. You haven't took leave of your senses, though, have you, missus?"

"I leave that to shipmasters o' vessels in distress," Tugboat Annie replied.

Severn interfered, his face pink with vexation.

"Now, look here, Annie; you keep out of this. You've done damage enough."

"Sure. I forgot!" Tugboat Annie rumbled. "It's the men that's the smart ones! You, and Crabtree, and Frog-Face there! I'm just a dumb tugboat skipper. Is that it? All right! Now you hold your jaws, all of ye, till I tell ye something. Crabtree, here, took me for a sucker yesterday. Well, I was! I let 'em beat me at every turn—steerin'-gear business and all!" She snorted contemptuously. "Why, I'd have towed him home for nothin', knowin' what I did! See? He knows already what I'm gettin' at, the wizened little rascal!" She pointed a horny, accusing finger at Captain Crabtree, who twisted his head in his over-large collar and looked remarkably uncomfortable.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll make it plain enough. I tumbled to his game the minute he told his man to order the tugs abreast of the gangway, where he had to talk with a megaphone, instead of over the *Barracuda's* poop, where it would ha' been much easier. There was something around the stern of his ship he wanted to hide. . . . That right, Crabtree?"

The shipmaster essayed a nonchalant smile. It was not successful. Tugboat Annie continued:

"I had a good look for meself, found out what I wanted, and moved up alongside the others. The bidding was most interesting, though our passenger didn't seem to enjoy it overmuch. Crabtree could make all the stipulations he liked, after he'd answered one question I'd put him. Remember it, captain? You bet your Sunday tights ye do! I asked him if his vessel had sustained any damage beyond the fire, water in the hold, and jammed steering gear. He said no, as there's witnesses to prove; and on that basis we entered

into an agreement which covered towage alone. But the book says—wait a minute—”

Tugboat Annie went to a shelf and took down a dogeared manual of maritime law, wet her thumb lavishly, and turned over to the required page.

“Ah! Here it is, as plain as the cast in yon queer feller’s eye.” She read:

*Where a towage service is entered into on the assumption that the tow is in a seaworthy condition, and she conceals from the tug any material fact which would tend, if known, to increase the amount of remuneration agreed upon, the tug is not prevented by the fact of prior agreement from claiming further reward; for in such case the towage may cease to be towage and become, in effect, salvage.*

“Well,” said Conroy sharply, “what are you getting at?”

“Just this, Mr. Great Thinker—that because he concealed from me the fact that the *Barracuda* had stripped her propeller in among the rocks, our towing agreement didn’t mean a thing, and we’ve got an unbeatable claim for salvage. If I’d left him piled up on the rocks, the *Barracuda* would have been pounded to pieces in the gale. But bein’ just a stupid, mutton-hearted female, I yanked her home. So instead of a lousy towin’ fee of two hundred and forty dollars, we’ll get a salvage award of about a third the value of the ship and cargo.” Tugboat Annie halted and blew her nose with an elephantine flourish. “And now, if ye can see clear to lend me sixty cents till payday, Alec, I’d like to go ashore and telegraph me daughter.”

Captain Crabtree was on his feet, shouting profane defiance, but Tugboat Annie soon reduced his bluster.

“Go outside before ye explode, ye nasty little feller!” she trumpeted. “And as for denials, ye can save ’em up for the marine surveyor. Now, go on; get out o’ here afore I fetch ye a kick in the rear!”

The chastened and badly frightened Captain Crabtree having hastily departed, Tugboat Annie stood with rugged, flushed face at the head of her bunk, her eyes resting on the hand-tinted features of the late Captain Brennan in their plush and gold oval frame. She was queerly silent for a time, and so were the two men

before her. Then she puffed her lips, blew a vast, irritable breath, and addressed Severn:

"Well, Alec! What about that sixty cents?"

"What are you going to say to your daughter, Annie?"

"Her home's in Vancouver. I'm goin' to ask her if she's got room for her ma, since there's no room for me here."

Severn's florid face went deeper red than usual with embarrassment. He said, "You'll do nothing of the kind, Annie. Your place is here, and I'm not letting you go on anybody's terms. Maybe I can't find the right words to tell you—"

"Perhaps I can," said Conroy, rising briskly. "Mrs. Brennan, I'm sorry. I apologize for misjudging you. You're clever—and you've taught me something about women. And, Severn, I'd like very much to put through our agreement of the other day and buy an interest in the company. As for Mrs. Brennan, I'd be proud and delighted—"

Severn looked up swiftly and met Tugboat Annie's eyes, and an almost imperceptible signal was exchanged. Tugboat Annie favored the departed Terry with a wink. Then she faced Conroy with booming voice:

"So ye discovered that a woman could be clever, did ye, Columbus? And ye'd like to buy into the company, now it'll be well off without your dirty money? Hmmp! I've no doubt! And ye're sorry—and ye'd be proud and delighted! Well, if ye ain't glued to that chair, I'll be proud and delighted if ye'll take yourself and your sorrow and drop 'em both in the dock. It'll be hard on the fishes, but they can stomach ye a sight easier than I can. And the sooner ye do it, the better!"

As Conroy moved toward the door she pulled off her dilapidated, shore-going bonnet and flung it on the settee. She grinned at Severn. "I feel more like meself now," she puffed, and her small, roving eyes once more met the framed, ingratiating smirk of the late Captain Brennan.

"What's that ye said, ye wicked man?" she asked huskily; and to ears and eyes that understood his kind of language, the smiling defunct made adequate reply.

# BOOKED & PRINTED

by Mary Cannon



**J**ulia Callahan Garrity, whom everyone calls Callahan, makes her third appearance as a cop turned cleaner in **Homemade Sin** (HarperCollins, \$20). She runs her business, The House Mouse, with her straight-shooting mother Edna Mae. Usually Mom is eager to play Watson to Callahan's Sherlock, but not this time. The murder victim, Patti, was a member of the close-knit Garrity clan, Callahan's cousin and girlhood best friend. The women drifted apart when Patti married an attorney and had three children. The youngest, eight-year-old Dylan, should have been in his special school for his speech disability. But he felt sick that day, so he was with his mother and was sleeping in the back seat when an apparent carjacking went awry; Patti was fatally shot in front of the boy. Although Callahan finds herself in the painful position of being branded an outcast by her own family for asking questions, she can't shake the feeling that something is out of kilter. Kathy Hogan Trocheck's characters and dialogue add an authentic Southern flavor to Callahan's search for the truth, while the latter's wry sense of humor softens the grimness of the situation. Definitely a series to watch.

Walter Mosley's **Black Betty** (Norton, \$19.95) should please President Clinton as well as the thousands of others who have been waiting for this fourth entry in the Easy Rawlins series. The place is L.A.; the time is 1961. A young Irish president is promising better days for black Americans, and Easy Rawlins certainly wants to believe it. At present, however, Easy's real estate holdings aren't supporting him and his two adopted kids, so he reluctantly accepts

a case from an anonymous client to locate a black woman who has recently resigned as maid to a wealthy white woman who wants her back. To his client, the maid was known as Elizabeth Eady, but Easy and everyone in the black community where he grew up called her Black Betty. Betty was dark-skinned, sure, but she also possessed a raw sensuality that acted on men of all ages like black magic. Black Betty always meant sweet trouble. As bodies pile up, Easy unravels a plot patterned with dark family secrets and cold-hearted greed, a portrait of a wealthy family reminiscent of Ross Macdonald. If that isn't scary enough, Easy's also got his crazy-killer friend Mouse on the loose, and a real estate scam threatens to bankrupt him. Fresh characters, powerful writing, and a nifty, twisty plot characterize *Black Betty*. But it is Mosley's invitation into the life and head and heart of a black man thirty years ago that makes this series irresistible.

Jane Lawless's wisecracking sidekick Cordelia moves to center stage in **A Small Sacrifice** (Seal Press, \$20.95), the fifth in this acclaimed series by Ellen Hart. Twenty years ago Cordelia and her five closest friends from their college theater department dubbed themselves the Shevlin Underground. Like Cordelia, several of them have gone on to become theater professionals. Diana Stanwood, in fact, became a big soap opera star who has retired to found a small theater in rural Wisconsin. She has invited the Shevlin Underground members for a reunion to celebrate its opening. Her five friends, however, have a hidden agenda: they plan to hold an intervention for Diana, whose alcoholism has become life-threatening. One of the members has also put murder on the program, which brings Cordelia's best friend, successful amateur detective Jane Lawless, to town. As in her earlier books (*Hallowed Murder*, *Vital Lies*, *Stage Fright*, and *Killing Cure*), Hart tells the story of this fateful reunion with deep compassion, strong psychological insight, bravura wit, and a clever plot.

Simon Brett casts actor Charles Paris in the lead for his fifteenth appearance in **A Reconstructed Corpse** (Scribners, \$20). A good thing, too, because it's almost the only bow Charles ever gets to take. *Public Enemies* is a weekly true crime format and a huge hit on British TV. Its most popular feature is a six-part dramatization of a sensational unsolved crime, with a plea to viewers to assist the police in catching the villains. Charles looks more like the missing Martin Earnshaw than the other poor hopefuls at the audition, so he gets the part. No lines, naturally, which leaves Charles with lots of time to drown his career doubts and do a bit of amateur

sleuthing. While Charles may tip a glass too many, it never quenches his curiosity or dims his instinct for spotting other actors (a.k.a. liars). And aren't the appearances of parts of Earnshaw's anatomy—timed perfectly for each week's program—too much a case of life imitating art? Brett's extensive background in British radio and TV always gives these Paris forays a delicious insider's perspective, while Charles's self-disparaging good humor and gently satiric wit make an excellent guide for this behind-the-cameras tour.

There's deadly irony in the title of Linda Grant's latest, **A Woman's Place** (Scribners, \$20). A series of sophomoric incidents at work are dubbed merely pranks by the new male computer hotshots whose firm has just merged with Systech Financial Applications. The female employees, however, are calling it sexual harassment. Hoping to avoid firing newcomers who are the keys to the merger's success, Systech hires Catherine Sayler, a savvy San Francisco private investigator who specializes in corporate clients. If she can give them proof against one man, the company can make an example of him. Catherine confidently goes undercover as a temporary employee assigned to a special project, but she hasn't counted on her emotional reaction when she too is cruelly victimized. And as the office jokes quickly escalate from vicious to deadly, Catherine finds herself fighting for not only her livelihood, but also her life. Although Grant relies on a psychopath for her killer, the lack of motivation for murder does little to diminish the power of her theme or the suspense of her plot. This is an author to watch.

Elizabeth George's latest, **Playing for Ashes** (Bantam, \$21.95), continues her Scotland Yard series with Detective Thomas Lynley and the unlovely but admirable Sergeant Barbara Havers. As with many of George's previous books, comparisons to P. D. James will undoubtedly be made. The book runs over six hundred pages and weaves several stories together, including detailed character studies and lengthy point of view switches. Briefly, a fire in a country cottage turns into front-page news when the body inside is that of a star cricket player whose rags to riches past is painstakingly exposed by Lynley and Havers. We also follow Livie through those years, from running as a wild teenager to sharing a houseboat and a cause—but not a bed—with a enigmatic young man. On the personal front, Barbara juggles the heady freedom and accompanying guilt she's feeling at living alone (without her senile mum), while Lynley tries to find a housemate. There's a lot here to enjoy, but don't look for a snappy pace or surprise ending.



Suspense writer Mickey Friedman's latest, **Riptide** (St. Martin's, \$20.95), is a somber warning that perhaps one can't, after all, go home again. Artist Isabel Anders suddenly finds herself unemployed in New York, thirty-four years old, and single after a longtime affair with a married man. She hasn't thought of her great-aunt Merriam and her childhood home in Cape Cache in the Florida panhandle for years, not since she ran away at fifteen; then she receives a letter from Merriam's attorney informing her that the old woman has been hospitalized after an accident. Isabel decides to return for a visit, subletting her apartment and leaving New York behind. Friedman weaves several stories here: a young neighbor waits for her father to get out of jail; Isabel's high school lover leaves his wife; a killer tracks down Merriam to a private nursing home; Merriam tells the truth about the day her father left home, never to return; and treasure from a sunken ship turns greed into murder. Against the backdrop of a steamy summer, in a dilapidated old house near the ocean, Isabel will find out something about her family, her old friends and a new one, and, most important, about herself.

Julie Smith continues her Edgar Award-winning Skip Langdon series with **New Orleans Beat** (Fawcett, \$21.50), and it's sure to strike a chord with the thousands (millions?) of folks surfing the e-mail waves via their home computers. Skip is assigned to investigate the death of Geoff Kavanaugh, who apparently fell from a ladder outside his home. She discovers that this shy, almost reclusive young man had one passion: the Town, the name of the computer bulletin board he favored. What's unusual is that a group of Townies who all live in New Orleans have been meeting regularly, and several of them allege that Geoff was beginning to remember details of his father's murder, which he witnessed when he was a small boy. One doesn't ordinarily equate a computer screen with access into the darkest recesses of the human heart. Julie Smith, however, has managed the equation quite cleverly, which adds up to an engrossing mystery.

# MURDER BY DIRECTION

by William Heller



**W**hen a John Grisham blockbuster novel goes from the best-seller list to the big screen, a big-name star usually comes along for the ride in the lead role.

But in **The Client**, director Joel Schumacher and screenwriters Akiva Goldman and Robert Getchell prove that integrity of plot and attention to detail can make for movie success even without a Tom Cruise or a Julia Roberts.

Although Susan Sarandon and Tommy Lee Jones play big parts in this thriller, newcomer Brad Renfro is unquestionably the star of the show.

Renfro plays Mark Sway, an eleven-year-old who lives in a trailer park outside Memphis with his twenty-seven-year-old mother and his little brother Ricky. His role in the family is carefully illustrated in the first

scene, when young Mark asks his mother if she has everything she needs for work, all the while waiting for an opportunity to steal cigarettes from her purse.

After she leaves the house, Mark takes his brother out to the woods for a smoke.

In those woods they come upon a shiny black Lincoln Continental and a mob lawyer named Romey Clifford who is about to kill himself, but not before putting the boys through a harrowing ordeal that leaves Ricky in a trauma-induced coma and Mark knowing more than he should about a terrible crime.

Precocious as he is, Mark is still in way over his head. The mob is after him to keep him quiet, and the Feds are after him to tell where all the bodies are buried, so to speak.

When politically ambitious

prosecutor Roy Foltrigg (Tommy Lee Jones) gets involved, Mark knows he needs help.

Enter the aptly named attorney Reggie Love. It is Susan Sarandon's portrayal of Love—an older, maternal figure in the novel—that brings some color to the movie. Like the lawyer in the book, she has a strictly no-nonsense manner. Unlike the original character, however, Sarandon is far from matronly, adding a wiggling walk and sexy smile to the fictional original. Still, the relationship between attorney and boy works. And, thank goodness, there's no hint of romance between the legal adversaries.

When the story turns to a gripping courtroom drama, prosecutor Foltrigg (whose nickname is Reverend because of his penchant for quoting the scriptures in court) and lawyer Love light up the screen as each one postures for the upper hand and tries to solve the mystery. Both Sarandon and Jones give top-notch performances.

Several small roles offer an extra kick. Will Patton is appropriately sleazy in his role as Sergeant Hardy, the crooked cop. Micolet Mercurio, as Mama Love, lives up to her character's name. And Ossie Davis is authoritative as Judge Harry Roosevelt.

A great deal of *The Client's* attraction lies in its attention to detail. The wing of the Memphis hospital where much of the movie takes place is, what else, the Elvis Presley Wing. TV press conference-ready Reverend Roy wears pancake makeup all the time. Mark Sway smiles a silly, crooked smile every time he speaks to a certain blonde nurse named Karen. And there are dozens of other such touches.

While book and movie are more similar than Grisham's other screen treatments (*The Firm* and *The Pelican Brief*), the two differ in some areas, with varying success. In the novel, young Sway tells his lawyer the whole story right off the bat. In the faster-moving movie, however, it makes sense that the lawyer more gradually unearths the plot, and it certainly creates a stronger mystery.

For Grisham purists, though, this film adaptation remains truest to the original novel. Others may also find it the best Grisham movie to date.

And while the average moviegoer may never have heard of Brad Renfro, the boy plucked from his sixth grade class in Knoxville, Tennessee, his name may well light up movie marquees for years to come.

# THE STORY THAT WON

The July Mysterious won by Frank Peirce of Honorable mentions go Theresa, New York; J. Washington; Virginia California; William F. California; John Walkington of Lancaster, California; Ann Cadigan of Floral Park, New York; Margaret M. Wilson of St. Helens, Oregon; R. E. Donald of Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada; Susan Kloszewski of Woodside, New York; and Roger Paul Ownby of Conyers, Georgia.



Photograph contest was College Station, Texas. to Julie G. DeGroat of Alec West of Vancouver, Thompson of Alameda, Smith of Garden Grove,

California; John Walkington of Lancaster, California; Ann Cadigan of Floral Park, New York; Margaret M. Wilson of St. Helens, Oregon; R. E. Donald of Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada; Susan Kloszewski of Woodside, New York; and Roger Paul Ownby of Conyers, Georgia.

## GITTHEMESSAGE?GOTIT! by Frank Peirce

From a distance the line of modern steel windmills on the horizon looked like stick figures, reminded me of Doyle's "dancing men" and how the Dutch had positioned the sails of their windmills to signal Allied fliers during World War II, how they still use them to announce births, deaths, marriages, and the like.

Massive clouds raced across the stark landscape with its meandering roadway, yet the windmills' silver blades remained surprisingly still.

I stopped my car, whipped out my laptop computer, fed the graphic symbols before me quickly into it, and read:

### THEDOPEDELIVERYISATONE

I heard a sound and saw a boy and a dog standing beside a weathered house I'd failed to notice. From the boy's body language I could tell he was reading the message, understood it.

I made a citizen's arrest and was bitten thrice: once by the dog, once by the police who arrested me for false imprisonment, and once by the windmills' message, which read:

### TAKEOUTHETRASHDON

The boy with the dog was Don.

In my haste I'd mispositioned my hands on the computer keyboard, struck too many keys, and like Huxley's hypothetical six monkeys mindlessly striking typewriter keys for countless eons, which Huxley claimed would produce all of the books in the British Museum, I'd produced a message.

The real message, of course, was "Garbage in! Garbage out!"



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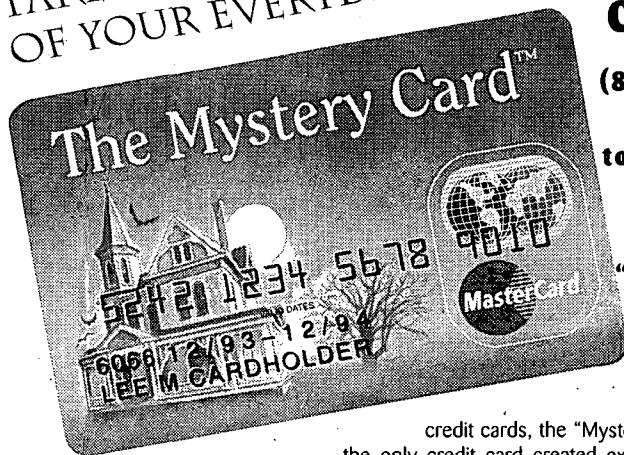
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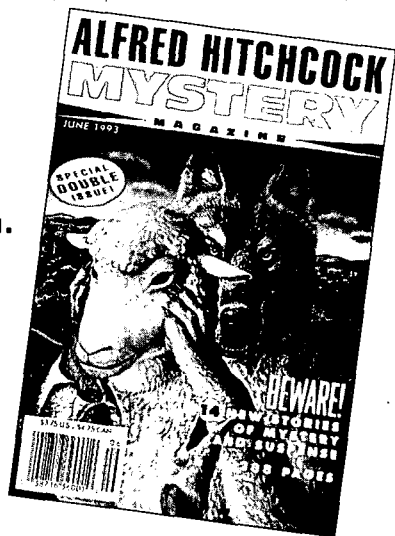
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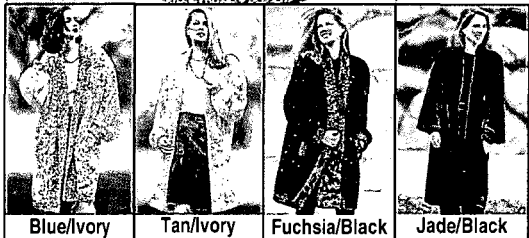
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